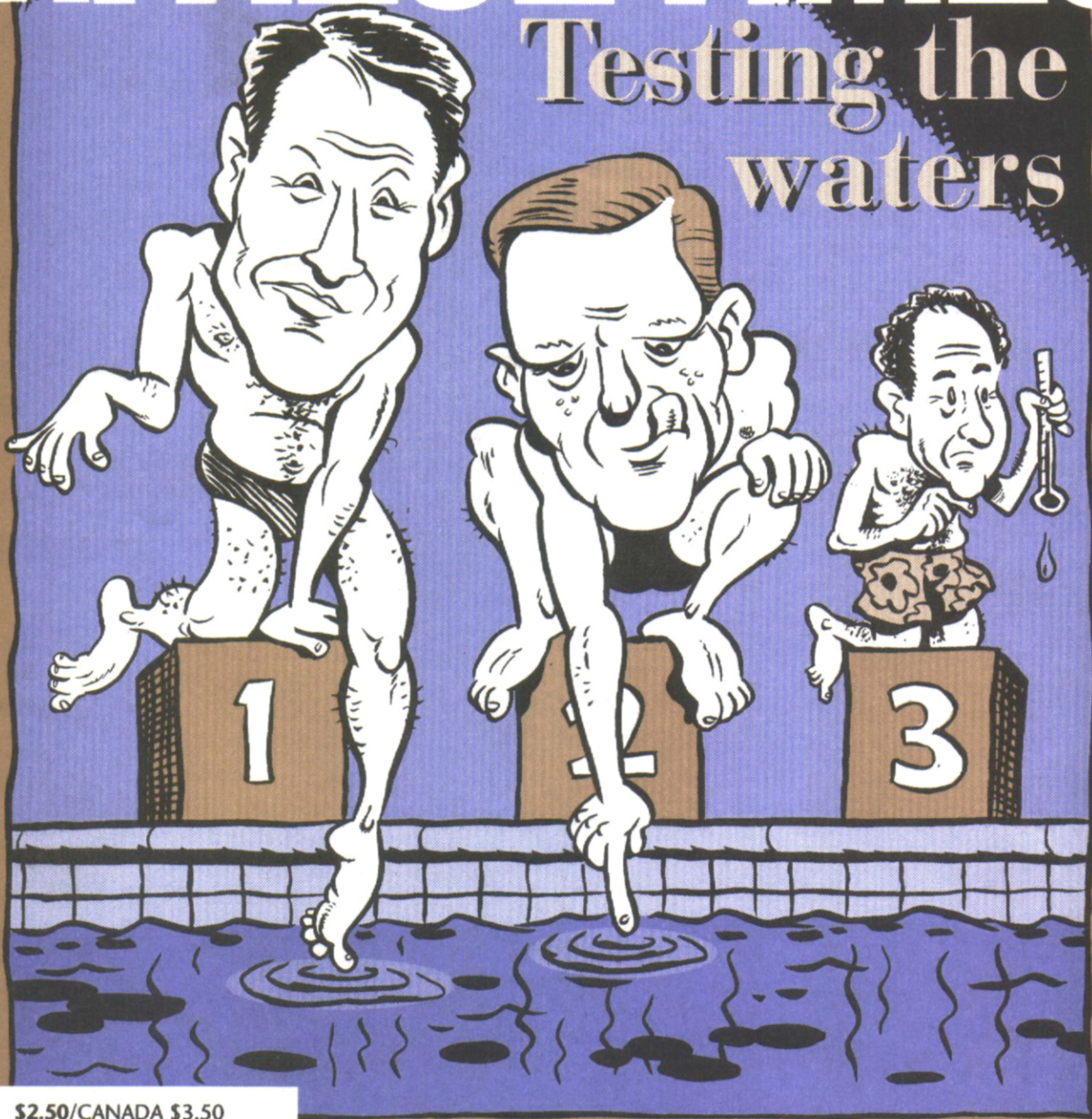


RETURN OF THE BLACK RADICAL

July 14-27, 1997

# In THESE TIMES

## Testing the waters



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Gore, Gephardt and Wellstone  
prepare to take the plunge in 2000.

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## EDITOR'S PAGE

***In These Times* finds a new publisher**

It gives me great pleasure to announce the hiring of Paul Obis as the new publisher of *In These Times*. His appointment concludes a search that for several years consisted of only sporadic forays. Once or twice I found good candidates and came close to persuading them to take on the challenge, but for one reason or another these efforts failed. Early this year, largely at the initiative of the *In These Times*' staff and with the vital assistance of Hamilton Fish IV, former publisher of the *Nation*, we embarked on a full-court press to find someone with the experience, know-how and enthusiasm to bring to the business side of our magazine the same high standards and professionalism that prevail on the editorial side. We wanted a publisher who could transform us from journalism's best-kept secret into a well-known magazine, and who could find the resources to put us on the path of steadily growing circulation. In short, someone who could increase our influence in American public life.

We believe that we have found that person in Paul Obis. He is the former editor and publisher of *Vegetarian Times*, a monthly magazine that he started as a newsletter in 1974 and that now has a circulation of 350,000 and annual revenues of \$15 million.

Obis sold *Vegetarian Times* to Cowles Media in 1991. Since then, he has worked as a consultant for a wide variety of publications, including non-profits. Being a consultant, he says, was frustrating, both because it meant only short-term relationships and because working from home was isolating. "The workplace is an important part of our social fabric, and I wanted to be part of a work community," he says.

Obis sees *In These Times* as "one of those increasingly rare independent voices that addresses serious issues. It's a magazine that makes a difference in the way people act, think and live—and one that has far more potential than is being realized." The magazine's editorial content deserves a much wider audience than it now gets, he believes, and is tremendously under-appreciated.

It will be Obis' job to help change that. He will be in charge of the business side of the magazine, which includes circulation development, advertising, promotion and fundraising. As he brings his experience and expertise to bear on our operations, we expect to see many changes for the better.

As for me, this is a dream come true. I will remain as editor of *In These Times*, which was my intent when I started the magazine. In the coming weeks, I will assist Paul in getting up to speed, but I expect soon to participate only in the ongoing editorial improvement of the magazine that we have enjoyed since executive editor Deidre McFadyen joined us a year ago.

James Weinstein

# IN THESE TIMES

"...with liberty and justice for all"

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*In These Times* (ISSN 0160-5992) is published biweekly by the Institute for Public Affairs, 2040 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, IL 60647. Subscriptions are \$36.95 a year (\$59 for institutions; \$61.95 Canada; \$75.95 overseas). Second-class postage paid at Chicago, IL and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to *In These Times*, 308 E. Hitt St., Mt. Morris, IL 61054. This issue (Vol. 21, No. 16) published July 14, 1997, for newsstand sales July 14-27, 1997. (773) 772-0100. Member: Alternative Press Syndicate. The entire contents of *In These Times* are copyright ©1997 by the Institute for Public Affairs, and may not be reproduced in any manner, either in whole or in part, without permission of the publisher. Copies of *In These Times* contract with the National Writers Union are available upon request. Complete issues and volumes of *In These Times* are available from University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, MI. All rights reserved. *In These Times* is indexed in both the Alternative Press Index and the Left Index. Publisher does not assume liability for unsolicited manuscripts or material. Manuscripts or material unaccompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelope will not be returned. All correspondence should be sent to: *In These Times*, 2040 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, IL 60647. E-mail: itt@igc.apc.org. For customer service and to place subscription orders, call toll free: (800) 827-0270. Advertising rates sent on request. Available back issues are \$5 each; specify volume and number. All letters received by *In These Times* become property of the newspaper. We reserve the right to print letters in condensed form.

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# InTHESETIMES

## CONTENTS

Volume 21, Number 17



## Testing the waters

Gore and Gephardt are the frontrunners for 2000—but don't count Wellstone out.

ANNYS SHIN

12



## Return of the black radical

Black progressives are vying to reignite the spirit of years gone by.

SALIM MUWAKKIL

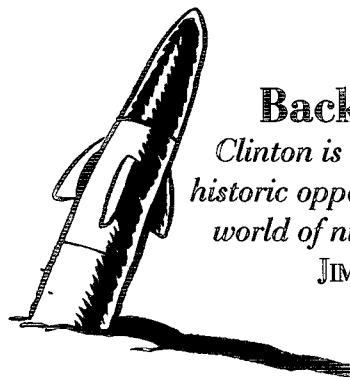
23

## Back to zero

Clinton is squandering an historic opportunity to rid the world of nuclear weapons.

JIM WURST

15



## FEATURES

- Ruth Messinger's mayoral campaign fizzles • Annette Fuentes .....18  
 SEIU takes on Beverly nursing homes • Fred Gustafson .....20  
 In the End: Hillbillyana • Jan Hearne.....32

## REVIEW

- In Print: *Mason & Dixon* • Jonathan Rosenbaum .....26

## DEPARTMENTS

- Letters .....4      Appall-O-Meter .....7  
 Sylvia • Nicole Hollander .....4      The Big Picture • Mark Dancy .....8  
 In Short .....6      Huge Mouth • Peter Hannan.....11

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## LETTERS

## Defending the status quo

Robert Neuwirth does an excellent job debunking the arguments against rent control in New York. But I was sorry to see him stop there.

Getting rid of rent stabilization won't usher in a golden era of new affordable housing construction. But keeping rent control in place only leaves us with what we've had up until now. Is the most visionary solution we can imagine a defense of the status quo?

Despite its overall benefits, rent control does have some problems. It privileges insiders over outsiders, people who can fend for themselves over people in need. And it doesn't encourage neighborhoods to adapt to change—which comes fast in New York—or to develop a good balance of housing, commercial space, parks and cultural institutions.

Instead of single-mindedly focusing on rent control, anyone interested in housing policy should be offering up a full menu of options, such as:

- policies encouraging home ownership by lowering building costs or by providing alternatives to high down payments and closing costs;
- establishing land trusts, which in other cities have made home ownership more affordable and dramatically reduced the volatility of the real estate market;
- a revival of public housing spending based on the sophisticated under-

## Rent control

Robert Neuwirth's otherwise excellent article about landlord attacks on rent control ("Revolt of the haves," June 16) misstated critical facts about California. First, the California legislature did not "effectively end rent control" in 1995. It did pass a measure preempting local vacancy control provisions, and banned future rent controls on single-family homes. This was unfortunate, but had limited effect because Berkeley, Santa Monica and West Hollywood were the only cities that had previously enacted vacancy control. San Francisco has never had vacancy control, so Neuwirth's claim that the city's rents skyrocketed 24 percent last year because of vacancy decontrol is obviously incorrect.

Bay Area rents on vacant units have risen dramatically due to a booming economy and relatively fixed housing supply. As a result of a 1992 ballot measure, San Francisco rents for ten-

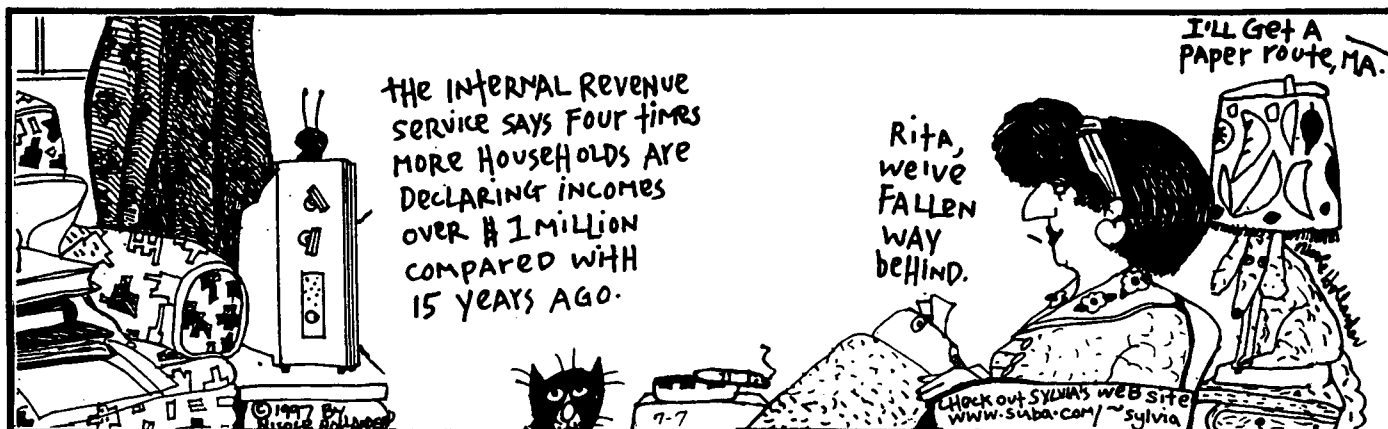
ants in place have risen only 1.5 percent annually since 1993. Rent control is thus keeping housing relatively affordable for thousands of San Francisco tenants and preventing massive displacement. The same is true for Berkeley and other cities whose rent control laws continue to provide essential protection for their low-income, elderly and disabled residents.

Unlike New York, California rent control does not require state legislative action, so landlords have focused on winning state legislation to preempt local rent control laws. The vacancy decontrol measure that finally passed in 1995 had been fought by tenants for over a decade. It was enacted only when Berkeley's own longtime Democratic state senator—in his last year in office, due to term limits—cast the key vote to preempt rent control provisions that his own constituents had passed.

Randy Shaw  
San Francisco

SYLVIA

by Nicole Hollander



standing of today's community development corporations;

- zoning and city planning for neighborhoods that include housing, commercial space, theaters, parks, social services and the rest of what the city needs;

- public/private or public/nonprofit partnerships, such as the Nehemiah project in Brooklyn, designed to build new housing with attention to both market and social values.

Housing advocates have plenty of ways to steer and foster markets without crushing them. Defending rent control against foolish and self-interested charges is a good start. But I wish Neuwirth and others would press forward from there and analyze creative solutions that could significantly improve housing in cities.

Otherwise, the best we can hope for is the status quo.

David Dyssegaard Kallick  
New York

## It ain't (just) me, babe

I've never liked Norman Mailer's exoticized writing on race, so I was surprised to see Salim Muwakkil, in his valuable "Deconstructing blackness" (June 16), liken my understanding of racial identity to Mailer's and to that of my supposed "beat predecessors of the '50s." Unlike them, I don't "extol" black identity's improvisational nature as much as I think it is a fate that anticipates the fate of many whites, too. We are indeed all being "abducted" from ancient ethnic and mythic moorings. I don't celebrate this; I see it as our American destiny.

I'm not the only one in my *Harper's* essay saying this; so do C. Eric Lincoln, Gerald Early and Glenn Loury. And in Chapter 5 of my new book *Liberal Racism*, from which the essay was condensed, comments by Harold Cruse, Stanley Crouch and others make the case that the cultural contents of black-

ness in America are improvised—and are all the more distinctively, if not redemptively, American for it.

Despite the *Harper's* title, "Toward an End of Blackness," I believe not that blacks should leap before whites into the uncharted territory of racelessness, but that some of the best did leap first. I don't agree with Muwakkil that my views help whites deny the depth and ubiquity of racism, but it is a pleasure and an honor to disagree with a writer so penetrating, lucid and fair.

Jim Sleeper  
New York

## Fighting BGH

Thanks for Jennifer Ferrara's article ("Sour milk," May 26) on the dairy industry's use of bovine growth hormone (BGH). Many of us here in the Dairy State fought to prevent its use, but Monsanto fought, too, and guess who won?

Now some dairies and cheese makers are trying to keep their products hormone-free, but it's not always easy. First, because milk is collected by tank trucks that just back up to farmers' barns, it's difficult to verify their com-

pliance with contracts promising not to use BGH. (Farmers can inoculate their cows without anyone knowing.) Second, the labeling of products as BGH-free has been challenged in the courts, and Monsanto sued one dairy in Iowa, Swiss Valley, because it refused BGH-contaminated milk. The dairy won, but just contesting such suits costs a lot of time and money.

Wisconsin Gov. Tommy Thompson

has been particularly subservient to corporate interests on this issue. Thompson said people in the state supported the use of BGH in dairy products. A Madison environmentalist, with the help of the Freedom of Information Act, got access to the governor's letter file and found out that letters were actually running 40-to-1 against the hormone. Thompson's original story was carried statewide on TV. The true story appeared only in the alternative press and in small articles buried in the commercial press.

For more information, and for a national list of BGH-free products, write the Pure Food Campaign, 1130 17th St., N.W., Suite 300, Washington, D.C. 20036. Or call (202)775-1132.

Jan Jacoby  
Clayton, Wis.

## Smoking dioxin

In his report on dioxin, chlorine, incineration and pesticides ("Poison and profits," June 10), Joel Bleifuss ignores what could be the Achilles heel of the chlorine industries—the high levels of dioxin in cigarettes.

Alarms about the incineration of dioxin and consequent increased health risks (especially of lung cancer) are legitimate, but cigarettes—with chlorine-bleached paper, many chlorinated (and other) pesticides and some top-secret number of chlorinated elements in the more than 700 untested additives—are generally ignored.

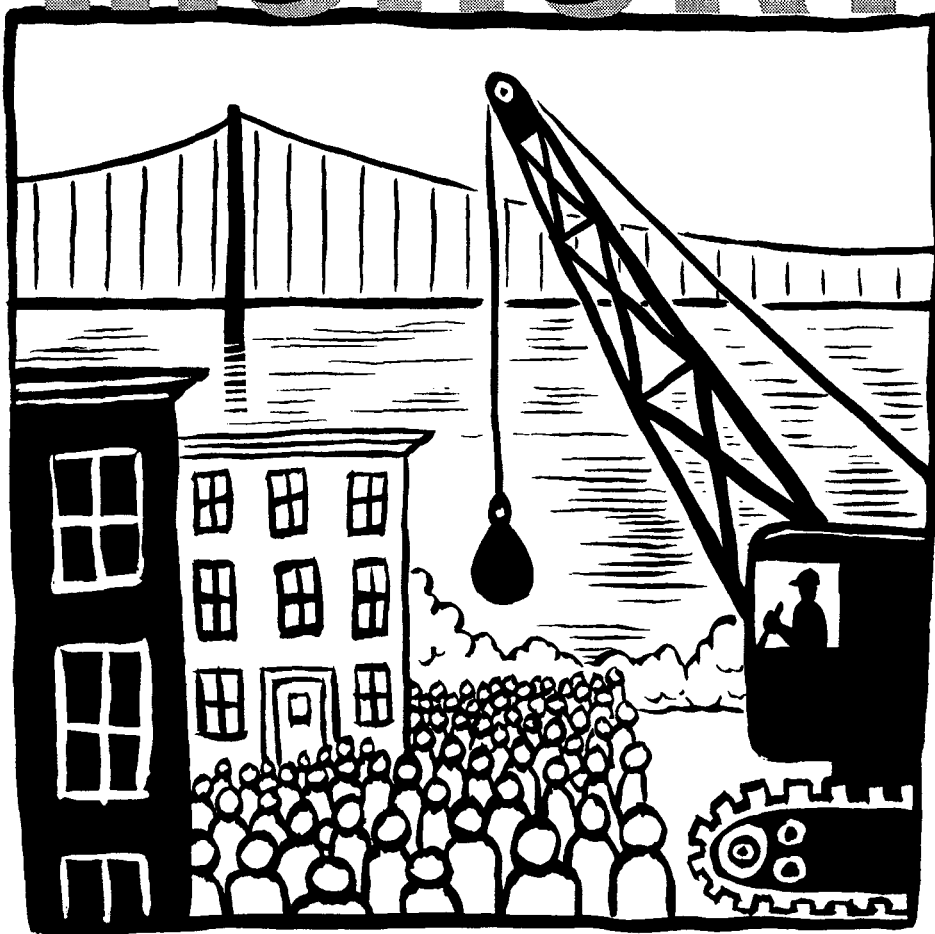
The anti-toxics community asks that dioxin be stopped before it enters our environment, but they don't ask that it be eliminated from smoking materials.

John Jonik  
Philadelphia, Pa.

**Editor's note:** Please try to keep letters under 250 words in length. Otherwise we may have to make drastic cuts, which may change what you wished to say. Also, if possible, please type and double-space letters.



# InSHORT



## Affordable housing —who needs it?

**H**ousing in San Francisco is scarce and exorbitantly expensive. Rents have reached an astronomic \$1,200 for the average one-bedroom apartment, according to the non-profit Tenants Union, and vacancies have shrunk to a near-invisible 0.1 percent. Predictably, the poor suffer the most. An estimated 100,000 city residents (including as many as 12,000 homeless people) lack affordable housing. Making matters worse, long-decaying public housing projects are now being demolished, forcing hundreds of Section 8 recipients into the tight housing market.

So housing advocates are outraged by federal plans to demolish the 466-unit Wherry Housing Complex, a cluster of beige four-plex buildings that lie vacant on the former Presidio Army Base near the Golden Gate Bridge. After Congress mandated in 1994 that the 1,480-acre base be converted into a national park, a turf war broke out between Presidio Trust officials managing the conversion and housing advocates over the future of the base's buildings. Although they plan to rent out some 600 units to park employees, bed-and-breakfast outfits and various organizations for \$2,000 to \$4,000 a month, Presidio officials insist that Wherry, which housed enlisted soldiers since the '50s, be demolished or removed within a year to make way for open space and native-plant restoration.

In a city where broad political agreement is even rarer than a cheap apartment, the plans to destroy Wherry have united the powerful Mayor Willie Brown, the Board of Supervisors and a wide array of religious groups and advocates for the homeless. They say Wherry should be used to house poor and low-income residents, veterans and park-service employees.

In April, the city's Board of Supervisors unanimously urged Presidio officials to retain Wherry. The Mayor's Office of Housing (MOH) also weighed in with a study favoring renovation, arguing that it would cost far less to fix the buildings than to destroy them. Renting out units to the poor at below-market rates would ease the housing crunch and even turn a profit, the MOH said.

But Cicely Muldoon, a National Park Service management assistant working on the transition, insists that renovations would cost far more than the MOH estimates. As an "elegant solution," she supports Democratic Rep. Nancy Pelosi's proposal to ship the units by barge to Bayview-Hunter's Point, a largely poor, African-American district on the city's south side—a plan opponents deride as costly and racist.

Tearing down Wherry in the face of the city's affordable-housing shortage is "simply committing discrimination against poor people," says Sister Bernie Galvin, a member

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of the Religious Witness with Homeless People, an interfaith group that has vigorously protested the demolition plans. "It's such a moral outrage. The federal government cuts housing dollars, neglects and then demolishes public housing—and then they have the nerve to come in here and take away from us \$80 million worth of housing."

Rene Cazenave, co-director of the nonprofit Council of Community Housing Organizations, says that Wherry is the best affordable-housing opportunity he's seen in years. "There's very little unused vacant housing in San Francisco that's amenable to conversion," he says. "These units are incredibly inexpensive, compared with what we're looking at in the private sector." Renovating Wherry would cost \$15,000 to \$20,000 per unit, according to the MOH study. Cazenave says comparable units elsewhere in the city cost \$120,000 on average to rehabilitate.

Cazenave points out that the city can only rehab about 500 affordable housing units per year for the 100,000 people in need. "In that kind of environment, we can't ignore a single unit that's potentially available," he says. "To just throw away 466 units is insane."

—Christopher D. Cook

## Cloning Rabin

After 23 years of domination by Shimon Peres and Yitzhak Rabin, Israel's largest political party has selected a new leader. Ehud Barak, 55, protégé and heir apparent to the late Rabin, won 57 percent of the primary votes cast by 167,000 Labor Party members on June 3, easily defeating the more dovish Yossi Beilin, a chief aide to Peres and a prime mover in the Oslo peace process. With Barak, Israel's most decorated soldier in history, Labor is again banking on a renowned military figure to return it to power.

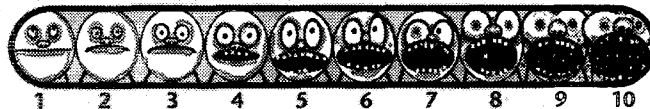
Barak's similarities to Rabin are striking: Both concluded distinguished army careers as armed forces chief of staff. Both were immediately recruited into the Labor Party leadership and groomed for the prime ministership. Both have been generally associated with the more hawkish element of the Labor Party. Barak even proclaims himself the bearer of Rabin's "legacy" and has been warmly endorsed by his widow, Leah.

It remains unclear, however, whether Barak will, like Rabin, become more receptive to Palestinian political aspirations. While he has quietly endorsed the Labor Party platform plank acquiescing to a demilitarized Palestinian state, he hasn't forgotten the devastating effect of last year's campaign by Likud charging that Peres would "divide Jerusalem." Thus, he has trod lightly on the Har Homa/Jamal Abu Ghneim issue, voicing only the tactical criticism that building a Jewish housing project on the disputed eastern edge of Jerusalem reflects "bad timing."

*Continued on page 9*

## APPALL-O-METER

THE IN THESE TIMES INDEX OF INDECENCIES



By David Futrelle

### Seeing redneck 5.7

Lovers of violence and invidious regional stereotypes will want to rush down to the local computer store to pick up a copy of "Redneck Rampage," an action-packed new game from Interplay. "All hell breaks loose when a couple of good ol' boys go ballistic and start blowing away everything in sight," explains an ad from Egghead Computer for the game. The game features "ten brutal weapons, including crowbars, dynamite, double-barreled shotguns and more." Players "get power from pork rinds, whiskey and beer" as they careen through "14 levels featuring Mortuaries, Chicken Processing Plants [and] Trailer Parks." What's next? "You're Canadian bacon, eh!" featuring action-packed north-of-the-border mayhem? Or "Ahl Pahk Your Cah in Hahvahd Yahd, buddy! Boston Brahmins go Ballistic!"

### The sweet smell of success 5.6

It's only fun until someone puts an eye out. In early June, Chicagoans celebrated the Bulls' fifth World Championship in the traditional manner:

whooping it up in sports bars, dancing in the streets, looting mom-and-pop grocery stores, throwing rocks at motorists and shooting people. Police Superintendent Matt Rodriguez told the *Chicago Tribune* that overall, the news was good, celebration-wise: Arrests were down from last year, and there were fewer reports of fires and looting. Still, he added, "nothing is totally successful if a ... person is murdered or any property is looted."



### Democratic visas 7.2

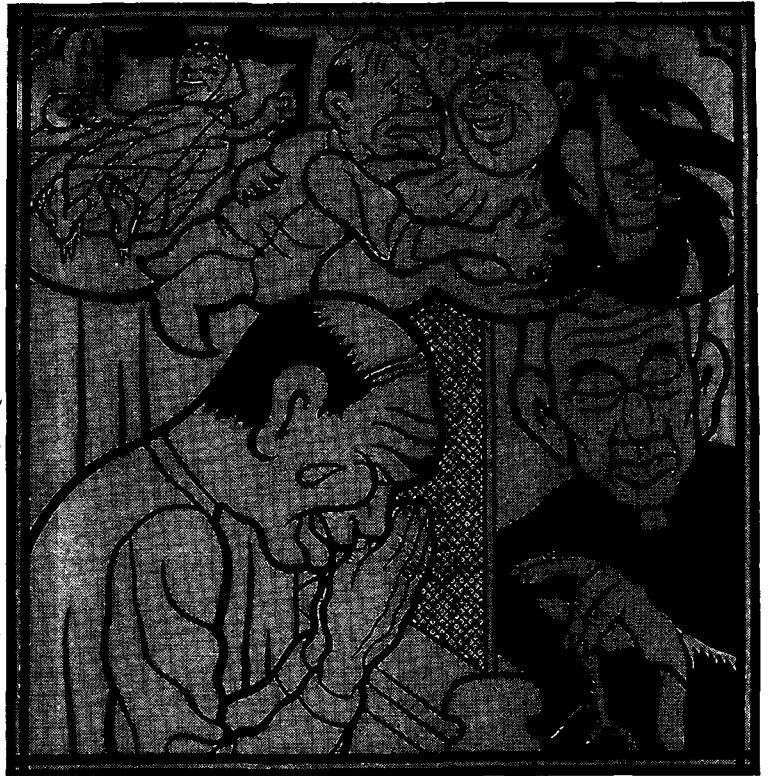
You've all heard the old arguments against immigration: Those darn foreigners talk funny, demand frivolous luxuries like schools and health care from the government, and take crappy jobs away from real Americans. Now the *National Review* is accusing immigrants of an even worse crime: They're refusing to vote Republican. In a recent special issue on "Immigration and Politics," *NR* reports with alarm that "nine-tenths of the immigrant influx is from groups with significant—sometimes overwhelming—Democratic propensities." Making matters worse, congressional Republicans today are too timid to forthrightly "voice white concerns" in public. All is not lost, though. *NR* suggests that some immigrants could possibly turn Republican, and holds out some hope that "a supply-sider or neoconservative" may be "elected to something in 2050, borne along by a multicultural throng like Tarzan on a litter. But ... [w]hy take the risk?"

THE BIG PICTURE

BY MARK DANCEY

**500K...**

**YESTERDAY  
and TODAY**





*Continued from page 7*

Barak will draw on his reputation as a highly competent, security-minded leader. Unlike Peres, who held the Labor Party opposition in check in the hope of being invited into a national unity coalition, the new leader will seek every opportunity to force a new election or build toward the next scheduled date in the year 2000.

Barak will have to work hard to rebuild his party's popular support. Recent opinion polls show him with a slim lead of 39 percent to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's 36 percent, with another 16 percent undecided. Working-class Sephardim (Jews of Afro-Asian origin) and Orthodox voters have been drawn to the right over the past 20 years as they've come to regard Labor and the left as culturally elitist, morally suspect, unpatriotic and even anti-Jewish. These voting blocs appear not to be upset by the charges of cronyism and influence peddling that have plagued the Netanyahu government recently. Nor will it help Barak that Labor, despite its social-democratic origins, is predominantly a party of the secular Ashkenazi professional and business classes, and is increasingly neoliberal in outlook.

Yet some important constituencies are likely to swing back to Labor in the next election. These include the recent immigrants from the former Soviet Union (about 10 percent of Israeli Jews), who were mobilized by one of their own, Natan Sharansky, to support Netanyahu last year. Largely secular and pragmatic, former Soviet Jews voted decisively in 1992 for Rabin and Meretz, the liberal/social democratic and militantly secularist party that served as Labor's main coalition partner from 1992 to 1996. Barak should also win back many moderates who crossed over to Netanyahu as a result of the devastating suicide bombings in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv last year.

Still, an additional complication may emerge, this time from the left. Yossi Sarid, the head of Meretz, also intends to run for prime minister, as may the head of one of Israel's two Arab parties. Either or both of these would draw votes from Barak. So, despite Barak's strength and Netanyahu's weakness, Israel's next election looms as a toss-up.

—Ralph Seliger

## Go ahead, cut my taxes

As Republicans in Congress deliberate on how to dole out \$85 billion in tax cuts—their reward for supporting President Clinton's plan to balance the budget in 2002—Democrats may be able to find a pony in this pile of fiscal malfeasance.

Four competing tax plans (proposed by the White House, Senate Republicans, House Republicans and House Democrats) all share basic components: a child tax credit, deductions for higher education expenses, a capital-gains tax cut, a reduction in the Estate and Gift Tax, and some expanded opportunities in tax-preferred Individual Retirement Accounts.

The Republican plans are rich in targets for the left. Citizens for Tax Justice has shown that the 40 percent of Americans with the lowest incomes face a net increase in taxes, while the middle 40 percent would see, on average, less than \$400 in tax relief. In contrast, the richest 1 percent would save more than \$20,000 annually in taxes. Republicans dispute these figures, but the trick is to analyze the plans as fully phased in—not to take their short-term provisions as eternal.

## The death of a dinosaur

NONE OF THE DINOSAURS OF MEXICO'S RULING INSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION PARTY (PRI) LIVED LONGER, OR WAS AS hard-line, as Fidel Velásquez, now dead at 97. For a half century, Velásquez headed the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), which since the '30s was integrated into the Mexican state. CTM members were forced to join the PRI.

Rising to power in the CTM in the late '40s, Velásquez purged the Communist left, who had built the federation in the first place. For decades, institutional anticommunism provided a common ground for close relations between CTM and the AFL-CIO's International Affairs Department. When U.S. labor opposition to free trade began pulling the rug out from under the AFL-CIO's cold warriors, it also created a rift with Velásquez.

He supported the Mexican government's turn away from economic independence and toward policies designed to encourage foreign investment, including NAFTA and maquiladoras on the border. He signed on to government austerity programs, even as he denounced them. Eventually, his support for privatization and lower living standards made him extremely unpopular with most Mexican workers.

At the end of the Velásquez era, the Mexican labor movement had begun chafing in his iron grip. Last year, 21 major unions established the Forum for National Unionism, widely viewed as a precursor to a new union federation breaking with his policies. The forum includes unions with strong cross-border ties to unions in the United States.

Velásquez' death will loosen the bonds between Mexican labor and the PRI, enabling the left, especially the Party of the Democratic Revolution, to build a stronger working-class base. That could challenge Mexico's low-wage development policies, and force a new relationship with "the colossus of the north."

—David Bacon



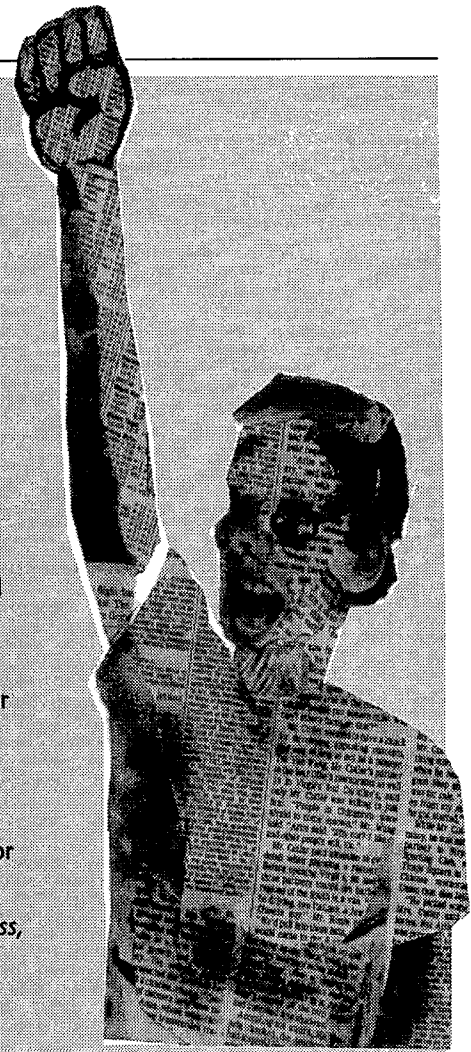
## A rebuke for Detroit Newspapers

THERE MAY BE A LITTLE JUSTICE AFTER ALL FOR THE NEARLY 2,500 WORKERS WHO WENT ON STRIKE TWO YEARS AGO against the *Detroit News* and the *Detroit Free Press*. On June 20, federal judge Thomas Wilks ruled that the newspapers had committed a number of unfair labor practices which caused and prolonged the 20-month strike. The newspapers plan to appeal, but if the ruling is upheld, they will have to hire back most of the strikers and make good on wages lost since the unions offered to return to work in February (see "Detroit unions shift gears," March 17). The unions are seeking a federal court injunction ordering the papers to reinstate the strikers pending the appeals.

Wilks handed down his ruling the day before a massive demonstration in support of the workers was scheduled to take place, leading some observers to suggest that it was timed to avert violence. On Saturday, June 21, an estimated 70,000 unionists and sympathizers from across the country descended on Detroit to march, many of them euphoric from the ruling. "People were hugging and kissing each other like it was V-E Day or V-J Day," says Daymon Hartley, a *Free Press* photographer and former vice chair of that paper's union bargaining committee.

But Hartley, who has been fired five times over by the *Free Press* since the strike began, warns that the ruling is a far cry from victory. Once strikers return to their old jobs, they'll have to start at square one, he points out, with no grievance procedures or dues check-off. "The ruling helps us regain the moral ascendancy," he adds. "But the Detroit strike has helped Gannett and Knight-Ridder [owners of the *News* and *Free Press*, respectively] negotiate tougher contracts with unions at their other papers."

—Dave Mulcahey



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In the same vein, the GOP tax cuts are designed to conceal the extent to which they increase deficits in the long run.

Besides fulfilling their lifelong ambition of cutting the tax on capital gains, the House Republicans would gut the Alternative Minimum Tax on Corporations, which is supposed to levy some taxes on profitable companies that manage legally to escape liability for any corporate income taxes. The Senate Republican plan goes a step further, proposing to whittle the education tax cuts—Clinton's trophy in the budget negotiations—from \$35 billion to \$20 billion.

In short, the Republicans' tax cuts are unfair to middle- and working-class families, they are fiscally irresponsible, and they provide unnecessary breaks to investors, corporations and heirs to large estates. There is hardly a defensible element in either package. The only hope for these awful tax bills is that the White House and Senate Democrats will bail out the GOP to save the budget deal.

Unfortunately, rather than challenge the canard that tax relief for so-called small businesses and family farmers is a social priority, House Democrats have only responded with less evil, scaled-down cuts in taxes on capital gains and estates. On the plus side, the Democrats focused their tax cuts more to the benefit of families earning less than \$75,000 a year. They also proposed a tax preference for bonds used to finance school construction in low-income areas, a cre-

ative response to the budget conferees' unconscionable omission of Clinton's \$5 billion grant for the same purpose.

A simpler and more progressive answer would be to simply pour the entire \$85 billion tax cut into the child tax credit and the Democrats' education provisions. Give it all to the kids, so to speak, and bag the supply-side nonsense about capital gains, estates and so forth. Such a proposal could cause Republicans to renege on the budget deal, but so what? Democrats might peel off enough GOP moderates to pass their own package.

If the whole deal unraveled, given the present ideological confusion and political disunity of Republicans in Congress, a new start from square one would probably lead to a better plan anyway. With no deal, current entitlement programs continue as under current law, which means no cuts in Medicare or Medicaid. If the Republicans refuse to pass appropriations bills, they have to shut down the government again, inviting a political beating that they are loathe to repeat.

Conservatives still control Congress but they lack a politically viable agenda. Democrats have the opportunity to deny Republicans the "crown jewels" of their Contract With America. The ocean liner of the progressive agenda may not have to turn around so much as gather steam to move forward.

—Max B. Sawicky



# Renting and raving

It was a game of chicken, and the conservatives blinked. Thousands of tenants created what one housing leader called "a minor populist uprising"—mobilizing, lobbying, protesting, holding candlelight vigils, even getting arrested—and ultimately saved New York state's system of rent regulation. At least, that's how it seemed in the frenzy a few minutes after midnight on June 15, the day the rent control laws were scheduled to expire. The state's top Republican politicos, one of whom had sworn to "end rent control as we know it," appeared to accept a deal that would keep tenant protections intact into the new millennium (see "Revolt of the Haves," June 16).

But read the fine print of the agreement and it turns out that the conservatives didn't cave in after all. In the pact that was signed into law four days later, landlords got much of what they were after, albeit through the back door. For instance, each time one of the 1.2 million rent-regulated tenants in New York City and the surrounding suburban counties moves, his landlord will be able to charge 20 percent more for the apartment. Given that more than one in ten tenants moves each year, rents are bound to rise dramatically by the time the laws come up for renewal again in 2003.

Rent increases will be even steeper for apartments vacated by long-term tenants. If a tenant has lived in her apartment for eight years or more, her landlord will get an additional increase of 0.6 percent for every year she has lived there. Thus, the rent on an apartment vacated by a tenant after 10 years will jump 26 percent. Low-cost apartments—those renting for less than \$300 a month—will see the worst rent bloat. Upon vacancy, these units will get an automatic \$100 rent hike on top of the 20-plus percent increase. Finally, the deal introduces several pro-landlord administrative changes, adding a four-year statute of limitations on rent overcharge cases and new provisions that make it tougher for tenants to withhold rent while suing their landlords.

For tenant leaders, the final result was at best a draw. "We achieved a political victory but a substantive loss," says Bill Rowen, political action coordinator for the Metropolitan Council on Housing and a veteran of decades of bruising housing battles. "The trouble is that a lot

of the victory was given away in the details. Under the final agreement—in which nobody had any real input except the political players—there are going to be more evictions and rents are going to skyrocket."

Meanwhile, the assault on tenant protections has moved north of the border. The right-wing Progressive Conservative government now in power in Ontario has proposed a plan to end that province's rent control. The measure, expected to take effect by January 1, 1998, would allow landlords to raise the rent as high as they please when tenants move. The Conservatives also plan to shift jurisdiction over eviction cases from provincial courts to a tribunal of political appointees.

"It's open season on tenants," says Dan McIntyre, executive director of the Federation of Ottawa-Carleton Tenant Associations. "We're being blown out of the water."

—Robert Neuwirth

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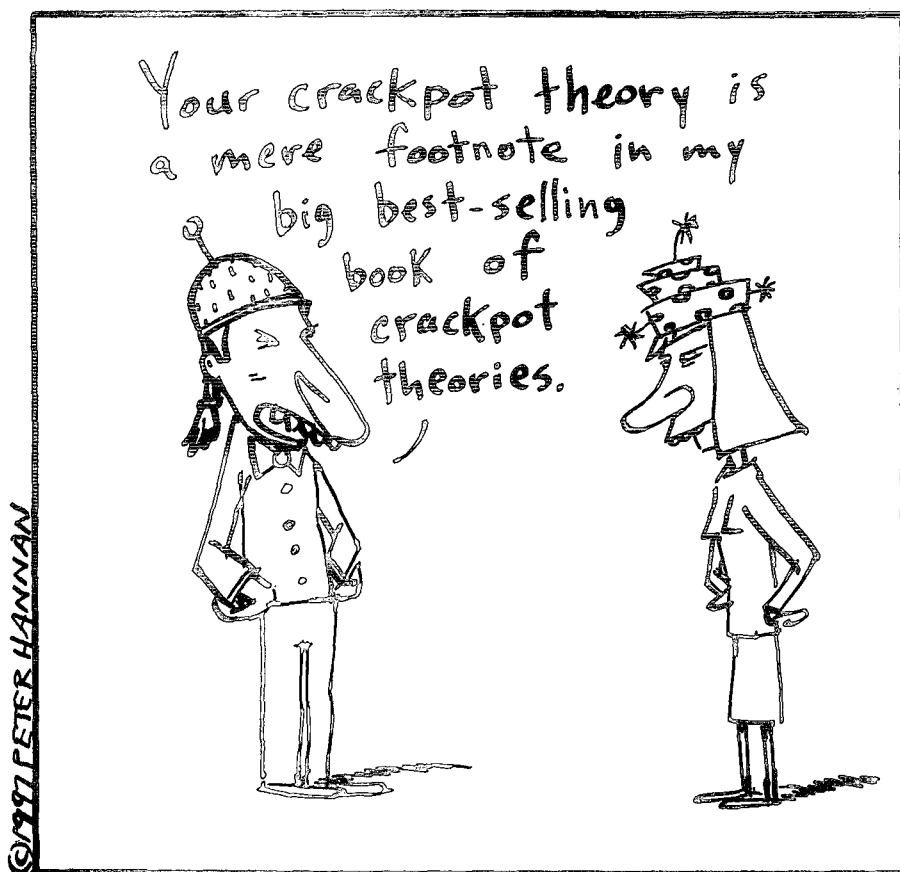
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## THE ADVENTURES OF A HUGE MOUTH

By Peter Hannan



**POLITICS**

# Testing the waters

# E

ven before Bill Clinton was sworn in as a lame duck in January, the race for the Democratic nomination in 2000 was off and running. Vice President Al Gore and House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt are the Goliaths in this contest, in which money and media coverage matter most.

*Al Gore,  
Richard  
Gephardt and  
Paul Wellstone  
prepare to take  
the plunge in  
2000.*

By Annys Shin

Minnesota Sen. Paul Wellstone, however, is a wild card with an ardent following among progressives. It's still too early to tell whether he wants to be the left protest candidate of 2000, à la Jerry Brown in 1992, or a force to reckon with, along the lines of Jesse Jackson in 1988.

The rivalry between Gore and Gephardt has been painted as a fight for the soul of the Democratic Party. But the similarities between the two men are more striking than their differences. They both arrived in Congress in 1976. They share credit with Arkansas

Gov. Bill Clinton for founding the New Democrat incubator, the Democratic Leadership Council. According to Americans for Democratic Action, the liberal scorekeeper of Congress, Gore voted liberal 65 percent of the time during his eight years in the House and eight years in the Senate, while Gephardt has averaged about 67 percent during his 22 years in the House.

Gephardt, a blue-collar son of a milkman and Gore, a blue-blood son of a former U.S. senator, first butted heads on the campaign trail in 1988. Gephardt's call for trade and farm policies that would better protect U.S. workers and farmers won him first place in the Iowa Caucuses. His second-place finish in New Hampshire catapulted him to front-runner status, but he quit the race seven weeks later after blowing his \$10 million war chest on the Super Tuesday contest, where he was walloped. Gore, who sought to steer his party to the right, cleaned up in the South on Super Tuesday, placing him third behind Massachusetts Gov. Michael Dukakis and Jesse Jackson.

The moderate Tennessean finally ran aground in the North, after a weak showing in the New York primary.

Fast-forward to June 1997. Gephardt, with strong labor backing, has kept up his criticism of free trade, while Gore has cobbled together his own bandwagon among green groups, anti-tobacco warriors and Silicon Valley types. "Gephardt is concentrating on those hurt by the global economy and budget-cutting while Clinton and Gore are focusing on the folks who are doing fairly well," says Roger Hickey, co-director of Campaign for America's Future, a liberal Washington think tank. When it comes to balancing the budget, Gephardt has pushed Clinton to free up money for public investment—something Clinton used to talk about when he was first elected—while Gore hawks middle-class tax cuts.

Whether Gephardt will even run in 2000 is a matter of debate, especially if the Democrats retake the House in 1998 and he's sworn in as speaker. Still, the media are having a field day playing up their rivalry. The press characterized Gephardt's recent opposition to extending most favored nation trade status to China as another opening salvo in campaign 2000. His successful efforts to stymie the establishment of a commission to investigate a downward adjustment of the Consumer Price Index provided further grist for the presidential rumor mill. Even his vote against the budget deal, which came as no surprise to his colleagues, became another episode in the Gore-Gephardt showdown.

It's easy to see why the media cynically view Gephardt's differences with the White House as part of his 2000 strategy. When Gephardt was first elected to the House in 1976, he opposed standard liberal positions on abortion rights, busing and raising the minimum wage. The man who today



skewers Republicans for cutting taxes on the rich voted for the 1981 Reagan tax cuts that were a windfall for the wealthy. Gephardt didn't adopt more traditional Democratic stances, such as favoring reproductive choice or opposing free trade, until he ran for president in 1988. His flip-flops have returned to haunt him, undermining his image as a man driven by principle.

Since the 1988 primaries, however, Gephardt has grown comfortable with his status as a kind of establishment critic—a partisan who gladly goads Republicans, but not too much; an insider who goes along with his party's president, but not all the time. When Clinton was elected in 1992, Gephardt quickly announced that House Democrats wouldn't always follow the White House's lead. In 1993, he supported tax hikes and approval of GATT agreements, but opposed the administration on passage of NAFTA. After the Republican victory in 1994, he worked hard to rebuild voters' trust in a Democratic majority with Families First, a set of modest policy initiatives including child health care and childcare tax breaks, but left public pummeling of Gingrich to House Minority Whip David Bonior. He opposed this year's budget deal, but did little to squelch Democratic support for it.

Gore has his own set of challenges. As vice president, he is tied—for better or worse—to President Clinton and his record in office. In recent weeks, prominent environmental groups took Gore to task on the administration's environmental record. The League of Conservation Voters threatened to withdraw its support of Gore in the Democratic primaries if he didn't persuade the White House to issue tougher clean air regulations. The Sierra Club ran ads in key primary states urging Clinton and Gore to "stand up to special interests."

The green backlash against Gore has been a long time coming. For years, environmentalists have been holding their noses around Clinton and Gore, who, despite their green-friendly talk, have eroded endangered species protection and backtracked on promises to end logging on public lands and tighten regulation of toxic water from paper mills.

Gore still has a fighting chance to win over other core Democratic constituencies. Consider the case of labor. "Gephardt does not have a lock on what some would view as his natural constituency," ADA spokesman Bob Corallo says. "Gore has his own relationship with labor and liberals. It's

not a forgone conclusion that he doesn't have the ability to reach out to Gephardt's constituency."

Gore has lately been courting labor heavily—and scoring. In January, he and Gephardt made the pilgrimage to the AFL-CIO's winter conference in Los Angeles. According to one observer present at the closed session, Gephardt donned a wireless microphone and worked the audience like Liddy Dole in her "the man I love" schtick, while Gore read a canned speech, took a few questions and left. But what Gore lacked in his style, he made up for later in substance. In April, the vice president unveiled new rules to block federal contracts to businesses that violated labor laws—goods that Gephardt is in no position to deliver.

Gephardt faces other obstacles as well. While his rhetoric may appeal to working-class voters, mod-

erate and conservative Democrats remain convinced that any turn toward the left would be electoral suicide. "Many Democrats—including most party leaders in the House—believe that the way to retake Congress is to build a majority around non-college graduates at the lower end of the economic spectrum," wrote Democratic Leadership Council President Alvin From in the *New Democrat* magazine. "They're wrong in both their political analysis and substance. No matter how you massage the polls, I cannot accept that Democrats can build a political majority on a foundation of big federal deficits, empty promises to seniors, trade protection and restoration of the failed welfare state."

Other observers contend it's the New Democrats who are out of touch. "We're at the top of an economic expansion, and even at the top, the average worker is getting 6 percent less than he or she did in 1989," says Jeff Faux, the director of the Economic Policy Institute. "There's a high level of anxiety after five years of economic expansion. You can



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imagine what it will be like when there's an economic downturn and the institutions that protect people aren't there anymore."

Gephardt isn't alone in his search to create a populist voice that speaks to low-income people. Sen. Paul Wellstone has chimed in with his focus on the poor. Other possible contenders from the liberal wing of the party include former New Jersey Sen. Bill Bradley and the Rev. Jesse Jackson, who announced that he's arranged a meeting on the 2000 presidential race at the Rainbow/ PUSH Coalition's convention in August.

**W**ellstone launched his cross-country poverty tour in May with a one-day stop in rural Mississippi, where his hero Robert Kennedy had gone on a fact-finding mission 30 years ago. When he announced the tour in January, he had originally intended to draw attention to the impact of the welfare cuts he voted against last year. But since then, the tour has taken on a broader mission of challenging the notion that the poverty programs of the '60s were a total failure. "It's been a long time since people have seen the face of poverty," Wellstone said in an interview. "We've turned our gaze away." Some in the media, however, bristled at a liberal white do-gooder trekking to mostly non-white neighborhoods to expose poverty and injustice.

In 1994, ADA gave Wellstone a perfect liberal voting record. Recently, he has been pushing public investment in early child development, job training, affordable child care and health care. As a presidential contender, Wellstone will have a bad case of "Michael Dukakis syndrome," a condition where a politician can't seem to shake the flaky liberal rap the media lay on him. But the former Carleton College professor is less queasy about being called a liberal than Gephardt (still a self-identified New Democrat), especially since his victory last November against Rudy Boschwitz, whose main strategy was to bait Wellstone with the "L" word.

Also to his advantage, the earnest Minnesotan can show more emotion in 40 minutes blasting his Senate colleagues for holding up flood aid than either Gephardt or Gore can muster in four years. Despite the fact most people read "media-savvy liberal" as an oxymoron, Wellstone is far from being an amateur when it comes to shaping his image. In one of his witty television spots in the 1990 Senate campaign, Wellstone talked in a high-speed squeal, supposedly to pack all his points in one commercial because he didn't have as much money to blow on ads as his deep-pocketed incumbent competitor.

"The question is can he excite people that can't be claimed by Gephardt or Gore?" says one top House Democratic aide.

Wellstone faces an uphill battle against Gephardt's deep

## Coffee, anyone?

**G**ephardt and Gore have tremendous fundraising advantage over Wellstone. Though Wellstone raised \$6 million to defeat Rudy Boschwitz in 1996, that amount pales next to the millions that Gore and Gephardt have raked in for themselves and fellow Democrats.

Ironically, the Democratic National Committee's negative balance sheet has given Gore an excuse to crisscross the country. In June alone, he made fundraising stops in Houston, Covington, Ky., Columbus, Ohio, Miami, New York, New Jersey, Baltimore and Baton Rouge. With former staffers scattered around corporations and lobbying shops in key sectors such as telecommunications and real estate, Gore already has his hands in several pots (see "The giant sucking sound," by Ken Silverstein and Jeffrey St. Clair, April 18).

Meanwhile, Gephardt has never had any trouble raising \$3 million for each re-election campaign. His time stumping for House candidates has earned him the loyalty of his colleagues and grass-roots support, something he'll continue to build during the 1998 congressional campaign season.

As House minority leader, he's one of the biggest beneficiaries of PAC money, which filled up half of his war chest in 1996. Labor was his strongest backer, with the health care, finance and insurance industries chipping in handsomely. Gephardt is also one of the largest recipients of out-of-state contributions, according to U.S. PIRG.

In the end, however, a big war chest may not guarantee success. With congressional hearings on alleged illegal fundraising by Clinton/Gore '96 about to begin, another round of coffee klatches could become a liability. The only good thing about the early launch of the race for 2000 is that it gives campaign-finance reform a couple more years to beat the candidates to the Oval Office. —A.S.

roots and Gore's deep pockets in the make-or-break caucuses in neighboring Iowa. Though Wellstone's grass-roots network helped Iowa Sen. Tom Harkin win the Minnesota primary in 1992, Harkin may not be able to return the favor. Gore has been courting Harkin heavily. The vice president has "come a long way in mending fences" with Iowa Democrats after ditching them in 1988 to head South, says Peter G. Willmert, a spokesman for the Iowa State Democrats.

Many Iowa Democrats also cling fondly to memories of Gephardt's win there in 1988, when Gephardt spent 144 days campaigning in the state. "Gephardt really understands Iowa politics as few others do," says Willmert. "He knows being engaged here is very important." In fact, Gephardt is already building up a store of good-will fundraising for Iowa Democrats who are up for re-election in 1998.

Faux's advice for Wellstone and other progressive candidates is to keep pushing investment in jobs and infrastructure. "The notion that we ought to spend our time rebuilding America is a very exciting scenario someone could paint about the future."

If Gephardt and Gore seem squeamish about taking up that message, it might not be too early to start looking for another messenger. ◀

**Annys Shin** is a freelance writer based in Washington, D.C. Her latest article for *In These Times*, "Capital games," appeared in the April 28 issue.



## **N**UCLEAR DISARMAMENT

# Back to zero

*The Clinton  
administration  
is squandering  
an opportunity  
to rid the  
world of  
nuclear  
weapons.*

By Jim Wurst

**T**

he U.S./Russian Helsinki Summit in March and the ongoing debate over NATO expansion have focused new attention on the issue of nuclear weapons. There has been a sea change from the buildup of the '80s when the question was "Why do we need so many?" to the post-Cold War world where many more people—including former military leaders who had nuclear weapons under their command—are asking "Why do we need them at all?"

A series of breakthroughs in 1996 has given the drive for elimination new momentum. In July, the World Court in the Hague made an unprecedented declaration challenging the legitimacy of the nuclear arms race. In an advisory opinion (which carries less weight than a ruling), the court stated that "the threat or use of nuclear weapons would generally be contrary to the rules of

international law applicable in armed conflict, and in particular the principles and rules of humanitarian law." Going further, the court said, "There exists an obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control."

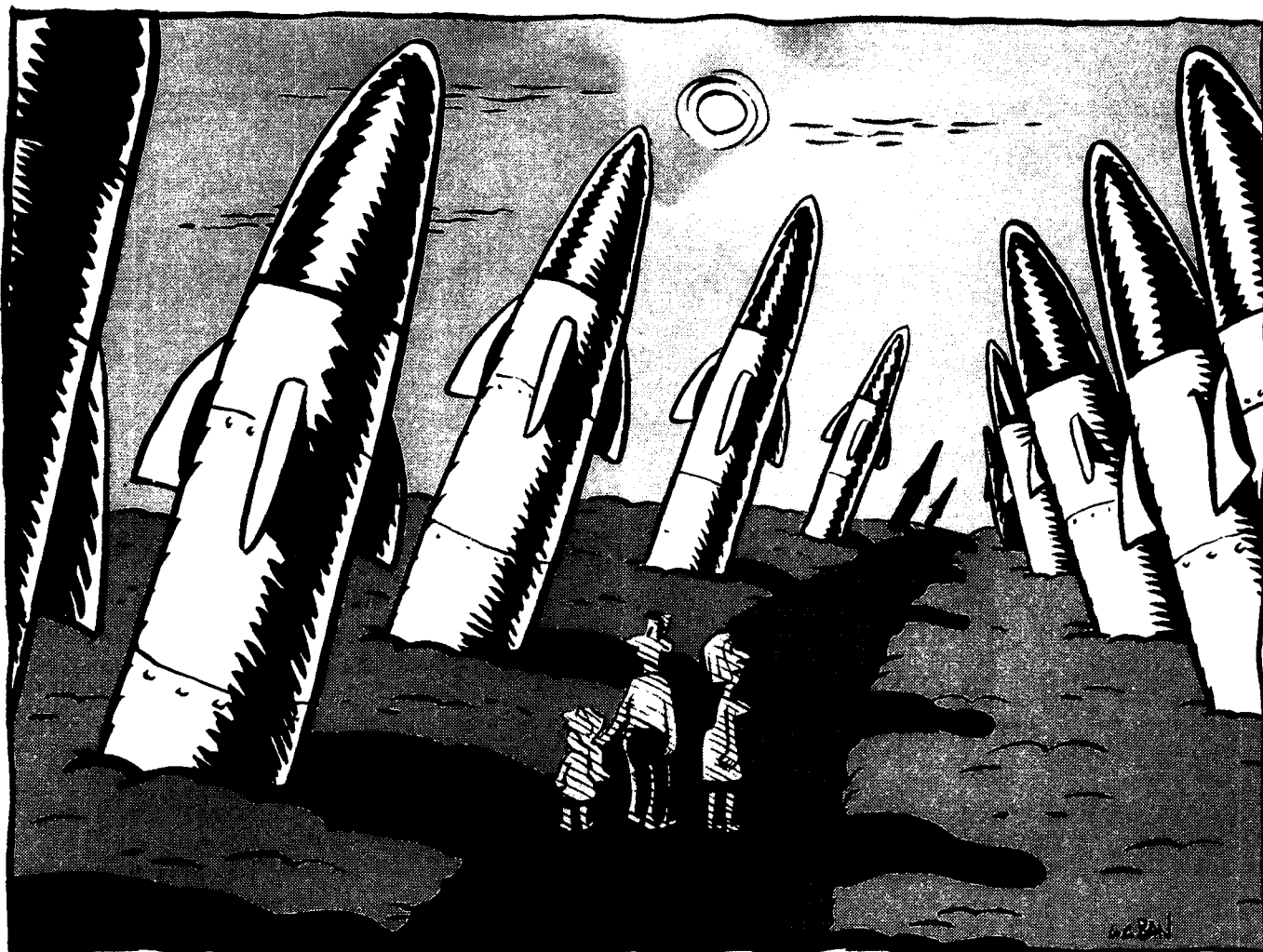
Following on the heels of the World Court's opinion, a high-level multinational study group convened by the Australian government issued its report on the future of nuclear disarmament. The Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons, made up of high-profile current and former government officials including Robert McNamara, former French Prime Minister Michel Rocard and Field Marshall Lord Carver of Britain, called the current concentration of nuclear weapons in the hands of a few states "highly discriminatory and thus unstable." It recommended a series of steps—many of them unilateral, such as taking nuclear weapons off alert—which

would lead to the removal of nuclear weapons from the world's arsenals.

Then in September, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the comprehensive test ban treaty, capping a 40-year campaign to end nuclear explosive tests. The ban is not truly comprehensive—new technology such as computer simulations and so-called "sub-critical" tests (explosions that use nuclear material but do not release nuclear energy) can still be conducted. It does, however, end the practice of spreading nuclear poisons over the lands of thousands of mostly indigenous people and makes it harder to develop new nuclear weapons.

On December 4, Gen. Lee Butler, former commander of the U.S. Strategic Air Command, and Gen. Andrew Goodpaster, former NATO commander, held a news conference in Washington to issue their appeal to radically reduce and eventually eliminate nuclear weapons. The next day, several leading newspapers worldwide published as an advertisement an open letter signed by 61 retired generals and admirals (including former NATO Commander John Galvin and Alexander Lebed of Russia) that called for abolition. This sort of endorsement has given nuclear disarmament an establishment legitimacy it never before enjoyed.

The push for disarmament was given another shot in the arm when the Chemical Weapons Convention became international law in April. The convention bans the production and use of chemical weapons, and imposes a rigorous inspection regime to detect violations. This far-reaching treaty undercuts two of the most common criticisms leveled against a nuclear weapons ban. Skeptics often point to the difficulty of verifying compliance. But if a chemical weapons ban can be verified, a nuclear weapons ban should be even



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easier to enforce, since the technology is far more difficult to hide. Other critics argue that you cannot disinvent nuclear weapons. You cannot disinvent chemical weapons either, but you can still ban them.

Fifteen legal, scientific and disarmament experts under the supervision of the Lawyers' Committee on Nuclear Policy released a model convention for the elimination of nuclear weapons in April. The convention envisions a five-phase implementation schedule over 15 years. Phase One calls for steps that the United States and Russia could enact immediately: taking weapons off alert, removing warheads from their delivery vehicles, removing targeting mechanisms from the vehicles and closing all nuclear testing facilities. Subsequent phases would set progressively lower limits on warheads, eventually bringing the other three nuclear-weapon states (Britain, France and China) into the process. Facilities for producing nuclear weapons and warheads would eventually be destroyed or converted to nonmilitary uses.

In depressing contrast to this wealth of vigorous proposals is the lethargy of official Washington. The 1994 Nuclear Posture Review (a Defense Department study of the United States' post-Cold War strategy) merely reinforced the status quo, and the new Quadrennial Defense Review does little

more than justify the purchase of more weapons. The current U.S. military budget remains at Cold War levels

President Clinton claims to have an ambitious arms control agenda, but his record does not compare well with his predecessor. George Bush signed START I and negotiated START II and the Chemical Weapons Convention, while Clinton oversaw the signing of START II and the Chemical Weapons Convention and negotiated the test ban treaty. "The difference is Bush took sweeping unilateral decisions, and Clinton hasn't done that," says Joseph Cirincione, an official at the Washington-based Henry L. Stimson Center, one of the leading arms-control advocacy groups. While Bush took the United States' long-range bombers off alert and removed short-range nuclear weapons from surface ships, Clinton has taken none of the unilateral steps that are within his power.

In fact, the most aggressive U.S. foreign-policy initiatives—NATO expansion and an anti-missile defense system—are undercutting any possibility of real progress. Clinton is pushing NATO expansion even though it would bring a nuclear-armed military alliance closer to Russia at a time when Russia is at a profound military disadvantage. While Yeltsin has grudgingly agreed to expansion, the majority in the Duma has not, and there are many voices in Russia ask-



ing why Moscow should agree to nuclear arms reduction in the face of this provocative expansion. These criticisms are not limited to Russia and the Western left. The expansion of NATO "would be the most fateful error of American policy in the whole post-Cold War era," says George Kennan, a former State Department official who helped mold U.S. policy during the Cold War. Such expansion, he says, would poison relations with Russia.

Missile defenses (popularly known as "Star Wars")—a bad idea that will not die—are still on the table. With Clinton's acquiescence, Republicans in Congress are trying to stick \$3.5 billion in the Pentagon budget for deployment by 2003 of a system of missile defenses designed to shoot down incoming nuclear missiles. Overlooked is the fact that despite tens of billions of dollars and 14 years of experiments, the technology still does not work. Russians also point out that in any case, such a defense system gives hawks in Moscow another reason not to trust Washington.

Against this backdrop, the agreements reached at the Helsinki Summit in March will have to serve as the framework for any future progress. The results of the summit, however, were mixed. Clinton and Yeltsin agreed to work on the next steps in arms reductions after START II enters into force. The unaddressed problem is that while the U.S. Senate ratified the treaty in January 1996, there is little evidence that the Russian Duma will do so anytime soon [see sidebar]. The two leaders agreed in principle that START III would reduce the number of strategic warheads per side to between 2,000 and 2,500 by the end of the year 2007. The agreement, however, slows down the rate of reductions agreed to under START II.

There are several problems with this numbers game. First of all, the numbers are still obscenely high. Down from a high of some 60,000 warheads in the mid-'80s, each side has roughly 12,000 warheads today. (Official totals are lower because functional but undeployed warheads are not counted.) The Pentagon does not want to go below 2,000—the number proposed in START III. "We've chipped away as much as we can," says Gen. Eugene Habiger, Butler's successor as head of the U.S. Strategic Air Command. But at those levels, the other three nuclear powers, whose stockpiles number in the hundreds, cannot be persuaded to come to the bargaining table. Others argue that even hundreds of missiles would be too many. For example, the Deep Cuts Study Group, an independent group of academics, says 20 nuclear weapons per side would provide sufficient deterrence. Still others argue that total elimination is the only moral option. As one pacifist activist says, "Negotiating the acceptable number of nuclear weapons is like negotiating the acceptable number of concentration camps."

A focus on numbers also distracts from the fact that these reductions are reversible. The warheads are not being destroyed, only disassembled. Warheads no longer targeted at the other country can be reprogrammed in minutes.

The START treaties are slippery in other ways as well. While the administration says it will not develop new warheads, it has created a new warhead, the B61-11, which is capable of penetrating hardened underground targets before exploding. Washington says the B61-11 is not new, only a "modification" of existing weaponry. Since these weapons are obviously meant to destroy the underground command centers of "rogue" states, such as Libya and Iraq, which do

*Continued on page 28*

## False STARTs

The Cold War-era SALT (Strategic Arms Limitation Talks) treaties were the first attempts to constrain the superpowers' arms race. The limits set on weapons under the 1972 SALT I and 1979 SALT II treaties, however, were higher than the number deployed by the United States and the Soviet Union at the time. In addition, SALT did not ban qualitative improvements in missile technology; most notoriously, it didn't ban the multiple-warhead strategic missile, an opening that permitted the massive buildups of the late '70s and early '80s.

In May 1982, President Reagan renamed the process START—with the "r" for "reduction" replacing the word "limitation." Of course, Reagan was in the middle of the most concerted nuclear buildup ever, so the change was essentially rhetorical. START talks only started making some progress in 1986 after the massive peace marches and once Mikhail Gorbachev was firmly in control in the Soviet Union.

START I, which was signed in 1991 and went into effect in 1994, set limits for the first time on warheads below what the superpowers already possessed. Gorbachev and George Bush agreed to cut warheads to 7,000 per country

by the year 2001. START I did not, however, require the destruction of any warheads—merely their removal from deployment. In 1987, the superpowers also ratified a treaty withdrawing their short-range nuclear missiles from Europe.

START II, signed in January 1993, set limits of 3,000 to 3,500 warheads for the United States and Russia. The Russian Duma still hasn't approved the treaty. One of the opponents' key objections is that the backbone of Russia's nuclear force—the multiple-warhead SS-18s—would have to be eliminated. Russia would be allowed to replace them with single-warhead missiles. But under START III guidelines floated by both sides, each country's arsenals would be reduced to 2,000 warheads a piece. Thus Russia would be building weapons knowing that they would have to be eliminated in a few years.

The way around this logical absurdity would be to begin reducing the number of missiles on each side to START III levels immediately. However, the U.S. Senate only ratified START II on the condition that the United States would not go below START I levels until START II enters into force. But since the Russia Duma does not want to ratify START II while NATO expands eastward, the two sides have maneuvered themselves into a stalemate. —J.W.

**POLITICS**

# Look for the liberal label

# W

*In her lackluster campaign to unseat New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, Ruth Messinger has run from her progressive political past.*

By Annette Fuentes

With five months to go before New York City's mayoral election, the campaign of Democratic candidate Ruth Messinger seems no closer to catching fire than it did when she announced her intentions to topple Mayor Rudolph Giuliani in November. Even stalwart supporters seem willing to concede her defeat before the fact. Blame it on the media and their endless polls, which have eagerly, almost gleefully, forecast her overwhelming defeat. Blame it on Messinger herself and her circle of advisers, who have done little to ignite excitement around her candidacy against New York's most socially and fiscally conservative mayor in decades. Chalk it up to the moral bankruptcy of the Democratic Party, where even the most progressive players are running scared from the liberal label.

Ruth Messinger, Man-

hattan borough president since 1990, built a 20-year political career in progressive Democratic politics from her base in the Upper West Side—known by many as the Upper Left Side. A social worker by profession, she became a public school activist and entered politics as a City Council member in 1977. There she built a reputation as a foe of greedy developers and an ardent defender of tenants' rights during the gentrification blitz of the '80s. Messinger was also a nationally known figure in the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee and its successor, Democratic Socialists of America.

Messinger is the first woman in 12 years to make a serious run for mayor in a city that has never had a woman mayor. She is the clear front-runner in a field of three Democratic primary candidates, leading in both fundraising and public support. Al Sharpton, the controversial black nationalist activist, is running with no money and a wealth of colorful sound bites. The third contender is city councilman Sal Albanese, a maverick from Brooklyn who has champi-

oned a living-wage bill and garnered some labor support.

The sole Latino candidate, Bronx Borough President Fernando Ferrer, would have given Messinger and possibly Giuliani a good fight with his solid support from black politicians, his strength among Latino voters and his socially conservative views. But unwilling to relinquish his post for a fight he must have feared losing, Ferrer dropped out of the race in May after a brief, flaccid campaign. His retreat was a gift to Messinger, who picked up the endorsements of the Democratic Party organizations in four of the city's boroughs (Brooklyn backed its native son Albanese). But that support was half-hearted at best.

Messinger has long been branded a Manhattan liberal by Democratic Party operatives in the outer boroughs who gaze across the river with suspicion at the heart of the Big Apple. They could have persuaded their white ethnic constituents to support Ferrer or Albanese, both death-penalty proponents and tough on crime. But Messinger is a harder sell: A woman with bleeding-heart tendencies, whose serious demeanor and lack of interest in fashion make men nervous.

Even if Messinger were a more traditional clubhouse Democrat, the odds against her would still be formidable. Real estate developers, Wall Street financiers and corporate interests that have benefited from Giuliani's pro-business, anti-union policies have pumped money into his re-election campaign. The most recent contribution reports show that Giuliani's top donors include hotelier Sam Domb, with \$118,000, and developer Bruce Ratner, at \$84,000. To date, the mayor has amassed a war chest of \$10 million, the legal spending limit according to campaign-finance rules. Messinger, by contrast, has raised only \$3 million. Albanese



has raised less than half a million, and Sharpton barely registers with \$12,000.

Money alone would not be enough to secure a second term for the Republican mayor in a town where registered Democrats outnumber Republicans by 5 to 1. But Giuliani also has the local press in his pocket. He has enjoyed four years of virtually uncritical coverage by the mainstream media, which have bought the mayor's line that he is responsible for a renaissance in this city once considered out of control with crime and corruption. A former U.S. attorney, Giuliani has used his crime-fighter persona to take credit for a national trend of decreasing violent crimes that has seen its greatest drop in New York and other large cities. Giuliani's unspoken message is simple: Re-elect me or watch the city descend back into chaos.

At a time when liberal is still a four-letter word, the mayor has also used Messinger's history of support for progressive causes against her. He has called her an "extreme" Democrat, whose politics are "from the '60s." Republican consultant Jay Severin was more colorful, describing her as a "sandal-wearing, grape-boycotting Upper West Side liberal."

But Giuliani's upper hand is also a result of Messinger's failure to penetrate his armor—and there are some substantial chinks. Giuliani launched the first of his TV ads on June 23, which depicts the mayor reading to kids in the city's public schools. In fact, his record on public education is abysmal: He slashed \$1.5 billion—20 percent of the city's education budget—from public schools in his first two years and stood by last fall as 90,000 students entered schools that had no room for them. He's spent more time campaigning for city cops to patrol schools than promoting better reading and math skills. While Messinger has hit Giuliani for cutting the education budget, she's failed to nail him on a more controversial issue: his support of private-school vouchers for public school students.

Messinger has ceded the crime issue to Giuliani as well. It's been left to Al Sharpton to raise the obvious and necessary rebuttals. The flip side of falling crime rates has been the surge in police brutality cases, including a rash of civilians killed by cops using unnecessary force. The shooting death of Puerto Rican Anthony Baez in the Bronx in 1994 and police officer Frances Livoti's acquittal two years later became a rallying point for the city's black and Latino communities. Things reached a boil again in April when 16-year-old Kevin Cedeno was fatally shot in the back by a police officer while running from a group of other teens in Washington Heights. Sharpton used Cedeno's killing to

grab the media spotlight in a series of rallies against police brutality, while Messinger was nowhere to be seen.

Giuliani's unwavering support for his police department, even in the face of serious wrongdoing, is a defect that Messinger could exploit to tremendous advantage among Latinos and blacks. A poll by the nonprofit Hispanic Federation in June found that Latinos would vote for Messinger

over Giuliani by 47 percent to 39 percent, while blacks would support her over the mayor by 67 percent to 21 percent. But if Messinger doesn't speak out on issues that Latinos and blacks consider important, many may stay home on election day.

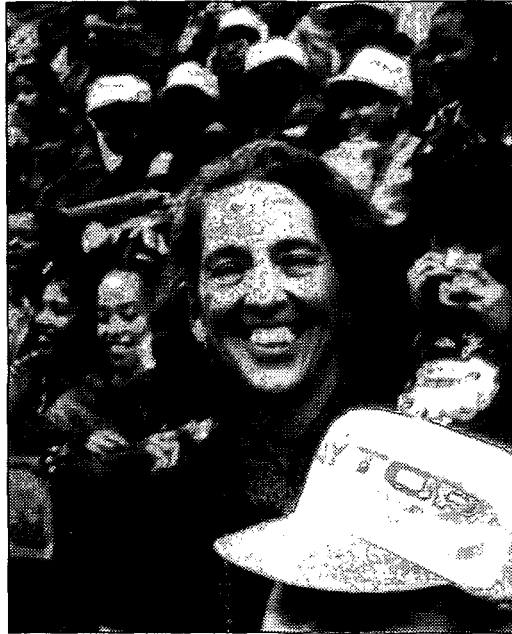
Messinger has clearly decided to do her best to shed the image and baggage of her liberal political past. Yet in her move to the center, she has avoided attacking Giuliani on the issues that are his Achilles heel. For instance, she hasn't criticized the mayor's Workfare program, which threw thousands of City University of New York students out of classrooms and into the streets with brooms and garbage cans to fulfill requirements for receiving welfare. She also has not decried the shortage

of day-care slots for Workfare mothers. Like many Democrats, she's allowed opinion polls supporting welfare reform to scare her away from criticizing those programs that hurt both the poor and working poor. She hasn't upbraided Giuliani either for his muddled and dangerous plans to sell Coney Island Hospital, a solid public hospital, to the for-profit Primary Health Systems. To her credit, she has attacked Giuliani for running a notoriously closed administration, one that withholds from the public and media basic information on the staffing and performance of city agencies. But it's not an issue that most voters care deeply about.

United behind Messinger, the city's unions could prove a match for the mayor's millions. To date, however, both public and private sector unions have watched quietly from the sidelines as the Democratic contenders have sought to define their candidacies. Only a few have made endorsements. Local 1180 and District 1 of the Communications Workers of America have endorsed Albanese, as has the Sergeants Benevolent Association of police officers. The city's richest and most powerful unions, however, will likely sit out the primary and then throw their support behind the Democratic nominee—or else remain neutral.

Both District Council 37, an umbrella organization of municipal employee unions, and the United Federation of Teachers have had warm relations with Giuliani. Stanley Hill and Sandra Feldman, their respective leaders, have acceded to the mayor's contract demands for shrinking their

*Continued on page 28*



**L A B O R**

# Broken homes

# N

inety-four-year-old Rose-lynn O'Halloran fell from her wheelchair as it was being pushed too fast by a harried nurse's aide at Beverly Enterprises' Murray Manor nursing home near Murraysville, Pa. When Bebeann Stauffer, a retired nurse herself, showed her mother's bruises to administrator Dan Landis and pointed out that she'd seen other bruised residents, he replied, "Old people bruise easily."

Stauffer chalks up the accident to understaffing. When she sought a meeting with other residents' family members to share her concerns, Landis limited her daily visits to two hours—a violation of state and federal regulations that ban visitation limits. Stauffer learned that Beverly had curtailed the visiting hours of other family members who had complained about staffing. Beverly lifted the restrictions only after *In Pittsburgh*, a local newsweekly, ran a story exposing the practice.

Understaffing is just one symptom of the cost-cutting frenzy that has swept the nursing-home industry. The nation's 17,000 nursing homes are being buffeted by the profound changes taking place in the health care industry. To cut costs, health maintenance organizations are promoting shorter hospital stays. Those not sick enough to remain hospitalized but too sick to care for themselves are landing in nursing homes. This burden is ultimately borne by taxpayers: Nursing homes, while largely privately owned, get about 80 percent of their revenue from Medicare and Medicaid reimbursements. But as the government tightens those programs, nursing homes are cutting corners wherever they can to stay in the black.

Beverly Enterprises, the country's largest private nursing-home chain, with \$3 billion in annual revenues, is renowned for its spotty client-care record and its anti-union practices. The Service Employees International Union has waged a 10-year protracted battle to unionize Beverly, which owns 583 homes in

31 states. The union believes that if it can get Beverly to clean up its act, other nursing homes will follow suit.

The nursing-home industry is a typical low-wage labor ghetto. Eighty-five percent of the workers are women, and 28 percent are non-white. Wages are abysmal. A 1994 SEIU survey found that certified nurse's aides earned \$6.03 per hour on average, while dietary and laundry aides earned \$5.75 per hour.

The workload, meanwhile, has grown more arduous. Seventeen percent of nursing-home workers suffer occupational illnesses or injuries each year, chiefly back injuries incurred lifting residents—double the rate a decade ago. Beverly's response to the epidemic of back injuries is typical of the industry. In 1987, the company implemented "Lift with Care," a training program to teach workers "proper lifting techniques." But Occupational Safety and Health Administration inspections at Beverly homes in 1992 found that nurse's aides were still performing up to 40 unassisted lifts and transfers in each shift. Many aides were lifting over five tons per shift.

Beverly Enterprises grew rapidly in the '80s, operating 1,125 homes at its peak in 1987. This rapid expansion was accompanied by a mounting body of evidence that Beverly provided inadequate care in its homes:

- In 1986, California officials blamed Beverly's sub-standard care for nine deaths in a 15-month period. The state fined the company \$724,000 and put it on probation.

- Beverly dropped a 1987 application to operate homes in Maine when state officials reviewed Beverly's record of patient care and reported that it was "so negligent it was mind-boggling."

- In Missouri, the 1987 death of a resident in a Beverly home outside St. Louis sparked a four-year investigation. In

*The SEIU is gaining ground in its decade-long battle with Beverly Enterprises, the nation's largest private nursing-home chain.*

By Fred Gustafson



an out-of-court settlement in 1991, Beverly admitted no wrongdoing, but Missouri imposed a \$500,000 fine and a state-monitored quality assurance program.

- In 1990, after finding repeated serious care violations, Minnesota courts forced Beverly to sell two homes and gave 40 others provisional licenses.

- Between 1993 and 1995, Beverly's Arkansas homes were cited for more than 750 violations of federal resident care regulations.

The SEIU campaign to organize Beverly began in earnest in 1986. "There were four or five Beverly homes represented by 1199-P," recalls Tom DeBruin, president of SEIU District 1199-P in Pennsylvania, who was an organizer at the time. "We had no intention of going after other homes." But he kept getting calls, many from Fayette Healthcare Center in Uniontown, Pa., where more than 80 percent of the workers signed union cards in less than two weeks. Beverly used every union-busting tactic in the book at Fayette.

In September, 1986, it fired 17 workers who wore union buttons to work, prompting the SEIU to file unfair labor practice charges against the company.

The National Labor Relations Board cases against Beverly mounted over time, ultimately involving workers at 30 homes in 12 states. The charges against Beverly include violent assaults, threats, spitting on workers and union reps, interrogating employees, cutting hours, changing duties, firing and threatening to discipline workers for union activity, and changing negotiated benefits.

In 1992, as the NLRB cases ground forward, the Pennsylvania SEIU launched a Dignity Campaign, comprised of three elements: 1) aggressive organizing of nursing homes in the state; 2) promoting a model contract written by nursing home workers to be used in coordinated bargaining; 3) passing a bill incorporating most elements of the model contract in the state legislature.

While the bill stalled in the legislature, other facets of the Pennsylvania Dignity Campaign bore fruit. Ten of the 12

## The Clinton connection

Hillary Clinton's Rose Law Firm has profited handsomely from Beverly Enterprises' wheeling and dealing. Saddled with a debt of \$850 million in the late '80s, Beverly decided to sell hundreds of its homes. William Kennedy, a partner at Rose Law Firm who later became an associate counsel to President Clinton, represented Beverly in a 1989 sale of 45 Beverly homes in Iowa to Ventana Investments, owned by Texas entrepreneur Bruce Whitehead.

Ventana purchased the homes for \$92 million. Whitehead finagled an \$86 million development loan from the state with the argument that if the sale didn't go through, 3,000 elderly Iowans would be left homeless. The other \$6 million came from Mercy Health Initiatives, a dummy charity that Whitehead controlled. The next day, Ventura sold its part to Mercy. That transaction netted Whitehead \$6 million in profit, while Beverly walked away with \$10 million in profit. Five years later, in 1994, an Iowa court investigating Mercy's charitable status calculated that the 45 homes were actually worth only \$47 million. But by then, Whitehead had severed all connections with Mercy, leaving the nonprofit saddled with the state loan at 10 percent interest.

Rose Law Firm's fee for such a deal was estimated to be nearly \$500,000. Roughly \$15,000 of that sum was probably pocketed by partner Hillary Clinton, who later crusaded for health care reform with cries against "unconscionable profiteering"—the same phrase Judge Gene Needles used to describe the Iowa transaction. The residents in the 45 nursing homes ended up paying 14 percent higher fees to settle Mercy's debt.

Rose Law Firm would have made even more money in a similar transaction nearer to home. In September 1989, one month after the Iowa sale, the firm again represented Beverly in a deal with Whitehead involving 32 homes in Arkansas, the company's home state. Whitehead invented another dummy charity to take \$81 million in tax-exempt bonds from an Arkansas development fund set up by then-Gov. Clinton. The scheme collapsed when Arkansas' attorney general accused Beverly of dangling a \$100,000 bribe to win approval for the sale. Clinton quickly condemned the deal. With no hint that his wife's law firm was involved in the scam, he excoriated Beverly for trying "to milk us like an old, full cow."

As he climbed the political ladder, Clinton mended fences with the company. According to political researcher Tom Ferguson, Beverly officials were among the first contributors to Clinton's 1992 presidential campaign. The Center for Responsive Politics reports that Beverly CEO David Banks and several other Beverly executives each gave Clinton \$1,000, the maximum amount permitted under the law, in both 1992 and 1996. In 1995, Clinton repaid the favor, appointing Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, a member of Beverly's board of directors, to his Advisory Commission on Consumer Protection and Quality in the Health Care Industry. —F.C.

nursing homes targeted by the union in 1992 and 1993 voted to unionize. SEIU was also able to use the model contract in bargaining, except for its provisions relating to number of staff.

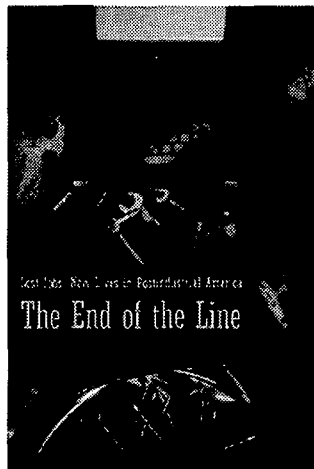
The union was so successful in lining up contract expiration dates in Pennsylvania that the threat of a broad-based strike in 1992 helped win Beverly's agreement to what was effectively a master contract at unionized homes. The contract cut worker co-payments for health care, established an employee pension and raised wages by 20 to 40 percent over three years. Most other unionized Pennsylvania nursing homes signed similar agreements.

When the contracts expired in late 1995, Beverly tried to extract concessions from workers in the new talks, such as demanding that workers have the right not to join the union. Meanwhile, company management removed union bulletin boards, changed health care programs and denied union staff access to homes. After working several months without a contract, workers at 17 Beverly sites held a three-day protest

Lost Jobs, New Lives in Postindustrial America

# The End of the Line

KATHRYN MARIE DUDLEY



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strike in April 1996. Beverly retaliated by replacing 400 of them. Though Beverly later called some back, it gave them part-time work, changed their job descriptions or assigned them to other shifts. The NLRB sought an injunction ordering Beverly to return the workers to their original jobs. While the workers won in court at every stage, Beverly's appeals delayed the injunction until this May, more than a year after the strike ended.

Beverly officials are "ideologically committed to ... a 'union-free workplace,'" says University of Pennsylvania law professor Clyde Summers. The company has some heavy-hitters in its ranks. Beverly's senior vice president for labor and employment, Donald Dotson, was director of the NLRB under President Ronald Reagan. The company's chief counsel for labor and employment, Hugh Riley, was a founder of the anti-union National Right to Work Committee.

The nursing-home workers and the SEIU finally seem to be gaining the upper hand. While the nursing-home workers in Beverly's 20 Pennsylvania homes are still without a contract, the state government persuaded Beverly to restart negotiations in June.

In May, Rep. Lane Evans of Illinois, ranking Democrat on the House Veterans Affairs Committee, chaired a town-hall meeting in Pittsburgh to hear testimony on his Federal Procurement and Assistance Integrity Act, which would allow the Labor Department to suspend federal contracts with firms that flout labor and workplace-safety laws. Republican Sen. Arlen Specter, in his role as chair of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, also sat on the panel. Beverly cannot afford to snub these Congress members, since the company holds a \$10 million contract with the Veterans Administration.

The SEIU's Dignity Campaign, which went nationwide in 1994, is gathering steam. Already this year, the SEIU has organized 3,000 nursing-home workers in 29 homes—as many as they had organized during all of 1996.

**Fred Gustafson** is a freelance writer based in Pittsburgh, Pa. He won the 1995 Western Pennsylvania Press Club Golden Quill award for excellence in labor journalism.

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**B L A C K A M E R I C A**

# Roots: the sequel

**R**ace is all the rage—again. Last month, President Bill Clinton called for a “candid conversation on the state of race relations.” As a token of his commitment to racial reconciliation, he created a seven-member advisory board that will conduct a yearlong series of town-hall meetings on race before making recommendations. Clinton also vowed to use his bully pulpit to keep the national spotlight focused on the issue.

*Black radicals  
are vying to  
reignite the  
spirit of years  
gone by.*

By Salim Muwakkil

The president's concern for this serious national problem is a welcome change from the indifference of his two Republican predecessors, but it doesn't come close to addressing the root causes of America's dangerous racial impasse. It seems, rather, to strike a pose. The symbolic grandeur of Clinton's gesture seems calculated more to burnish his own legacy than to redress the legacy of slavery.

The president's concern for this serious national problem is a welcome change from the indifference of his two Republican predecessors, but it doesn't come close to addressing the root causes of America's dangerous racial impasse. It seems, rather, to strike a pose. The symbolic grandeur of Clinton's gesture seems calculated more to burnish his own legacy than to redress the legacy of slavery.

“America has a monumental inability to face up to the evils of its racist history,” says William Strickland, associate professor of Afro-American studies at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. “But unless it does, I have no doubt at all that we will tear each other apart.” Any meaningful “conversation” on race has to address structural injustices and inequalities, Strickland adds, or else “the real issue will be covered over and denied, and we will speed down the road to destruction.”

The listlessness of public discourse on race cannot be blamed entirely on white America's denial reflex. It has partly to do with the absence of radical voices urging Americans of all races to get to the roots of racism. The long protest tradition of black radicalism, which included Nat Turner, Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, W.E.B. Du Bois, Paul Robeson, A. Philip Randolph, Bayard Rustin, Malcolm X and even the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., seems to have slipped into dormancy. Gone is the spirit of the 1960s, when groups like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Black Panther Party enjoyed something like a popular mandate, especially among black youth, thanks to extensive community organizing, direct confrontation with police and ideological appeals.

By linking the struggle of blacks in America to a global battle against the forces of exploitation and imperialism, black radicals provided a more rigorous analysis of the situation facing African-Americans. What's more, they framed the issue within an ideological context that transcended race and ethnicity, attracting support from other groups with similar ideologies. Because African-Americans were among those most adversely affected by capitalist exploitation, they provided a focal point for leftist organizers and served to energize the entire radical movement.

Radicals like Du Bois, Robeson, Randolph and Panther founder Huey Newton explicitly espoused socialism and generally eschewed the exclusive racial focus of black nationalism. Once Malcolm X broke with the socially conservative Nation of Islam (NOI), he crossed over from the accommodationist strain of the movement exclusively concerned with racial identity to the protest tradition struggling for economic and social changes.

Contemporary black radicals such as Manning Marable and Cornel West continue to define themselves as leftists of one sort or another. They oppose all forms of oppression, including sexism, racism, class exploitation, patriarchy and homophobia, and favor forming coalitions with other oppressed groups. And yet, their point of view is difficult to sell to a community assaulted and insulted by overt racial animus.

Issues of identity have always been a double-edged sword in the struggle for black equality. Since racial exclusion is cen-

Issues of identity have always been a double-edged sword in the struggle for black equality. Since racial exclusion is cen-

tral to the plight of African-Americans, it has often been the primary focus of struggle. But by reducing African-Americans' political and social interests to their racial component alone, black leaders and theorists often created expectations that could not be met. Greater political representation and new footholds in elite cultural institutions have often turned out to be little more than symbolic. They have not necessarily led to empowerment in a broader sense or significantly improved the statistical profile of the black community.

"The most critical mistake in our struggle was the tendency to emphasize electoralism and what I call 'symbolic representation,' rather than activism," explains Manning Marable, director of the Institute for Research in African-American Studies at Columbia University. Marable argues that the African-American community's focus on symbolic "blackness" reinforced the notion that the electoral success of some black candidates signified racial progress. When these black politicians failed to slow the decline in their constituents' quality of life, many disappointed black activists turned to black nationalism and racial separatism.

A similar disenchantment has befallen black studies programs at colleges and universities. In the '60s and '70s, the "black studies" movement fought for more inclusive curricula and measures to increase the enrollment of black students. In some respects, the effort succeeded. From the mid-'70s onward, blacks have been attending college in unprecedented numbers, and black studies programs are thriving in some of the nation's most elite institutions. In the opinion of some black studies pioneers, however, the movement has gone off track. "We fought for black studies to make a difference in the black community, not to become ivory towers of speculation," says Armstead Allen, a professor of black studies at Chicago's Olive-Harvey City College and an organizer of the highly touted annual Black Studies Conference, which recently commemorated its 20th year.

In the absence of a radical political movement, theorists of the black left have spent much of the last two decades isolated in the academy. Engaged in theoretical discourse with similarly situated colleagues, these radicals lost touch with the masses of people they professed to represent. The media have lionized some in this group (including Marable, West, Henry Louis Gates, bell hooks and Robin Kelley) as the "new black intellectuals." The presupposition all along was that once African-Americans took their place in academia and other halls of power, they would actually influence public policy. Ironically, the rise of these public intellectuals has coincided



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with the free-fall of poor blacks. "If it is the best of times for the black middle class—the heirs of W.E.B. Du Bois's 'Talented Tenth'—it is the worst of times for an equally large segment of our community," West and Gates wrote in the preface to their 1996 book *The Future Of The Race*.

Some critics have gone further, even blaming black intellectuals in part for the deepening crisis within many black communities. The disproportionate prominence of these black "celebrity" academics actually serves to demobilize serious political activism, these critics argue, by confusing radical poses with action. "The black left must learn to speak a language that resonates in people's daily lives," says Marable. "Progressive, or radical, black politics has to ground itself in practical issues."

Northwestern University political science professor Adolph Reed is famously scornful of celebrity academics and the literary turn in black studies. With equal vigor, he derides black activists' willingness to accommodate "proto-fascist" black nationalists like NOI leader Minister Louis Farrakhan. Black radicals, Reed argues, must tackle the concrete issues that affect all working people. "For all the limitations of the labor movement and of the individuals who comprise it, there's no place else where the left's political concerns gain a hearing and have a constituency," he wrote last year in the *Village Voice*.

Some may argue that the voice of black radicalism entered the national discussion two years ago with the Million Man March. But the message of the march, like the message of its NOI sponsors, was more a call for self-reflection than a confrontation with oppressive power. While Farrakhan may scare whites with his rhetoric of racial apocalypse, much of his political outlook—especially on economic issues—conforms to that of the most conservative white Americans. "Farrakhan's program owes more to Booker T.



Washington than it does to the radical critique of Malcolm X, after his break with the Nation," Marable says.

As Marable pointed out in his 1996 book *Speaking Truth To Power*, socialist ideology has never been very popular within the black community. Narrow nationalists eschew it because they don't trust radical whites; entrepreneurs hate it because it threatens black private capital accumulation; black politicians dislike it because they are committed either to some form of liberal Keynesianism or conservative capitalism; and black preachers mistrust it because it's skeptical of religion.

Nonetheless, black radicals are again preparing to bring their message to the people. Marable, for example, is working with a handful of other academics to convene a Black Radical Congress in June 1998. This new group intends not only to focus greater attention on the economic forces that thwart poor and working-class African-Americans, but "to rebuild a strong, uncompromising movement for human rights, full employment and self-determination." Many so-called "celebrity academics," including West, Kelley and Reed, are expected to participate, as are labor activist Royce Adams of the International Longshoremen's Union; Robert Chrisman, publisher of the 27-year-old theoretical journal *Black Scholar*; former Communist Party members Charlene Mitchell and Jarvis Tyner; attorney and "critical race theory" advocate Kimberlé Crenshaw; economist and columnist

Julianne Malveaux; and more than 50 others.

"As a historian," Marable says, "I don't know of another time in our history when so many in the black radical community—including progressive nationalists, gay and feminist activists and labor activists, among others—committed to come together to help form a broad united front of progressive voices."

One of the conference's most daunting challenges will be to heal the long-standing rift separating black nationalists and radicals. "Pan-African nationalism and the black left are natural allies, and these tendencies need to be working together, not antagonistically," says Ron Daniels, director of the New York-based Center for Constitutional Rights. "Contemporary conditions in black America help us understand that we must focus on both class and race. That's why I call myself a progressive nationalist."

African-American leaders can't afford not to unite, Daniels says. He hears a number of "conversations" happening now on race, although they're not the ones Clinton has in mind. At annual National State of the Race conferences, for example, grass-roots groups meet to assess the condition of black America. "I do a lot of traveling around the country. From St. Petersburg, Fla., to New York City and Oakland, Calif., there are people being mobilized," Daniels says. "The crisis in black America is too urgent for us to sit back and wait for other folks to start conversations about us." ▲

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# I N P R I N T

## Pynchon's tangle

By Jonathan Rosenbaum

It's always been one of the paradoxes of Thomas Pynchon's fiction that he combines the encyclopedic researches of a polymath with the rude instincts of a populist. V., *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Gravity's Rainbow*, the stories in *Slow Learner*, *Vineland* and now *Mason & Dixon* synthesize an awesome array of scientific and historical speculation while steadily sabotaging, with a compulsive anti-elitism, every effort to marshal this material into the stuff of high art. Fusing studied literary pastiche with collegiate humor and flip song lyrics, philosophical soul-searching with barroom brawls and locker-room asides, Pynchon's intricate and unwieldy narratives tend to define and confound boundaries in the same gesture. So it stands to reason that this epic about American origins, focused on a couple of low-level line drawers (the 18th century executors of the Mason-Dixon Line), winds up favoring sprawl over progression, digression over linear advance.

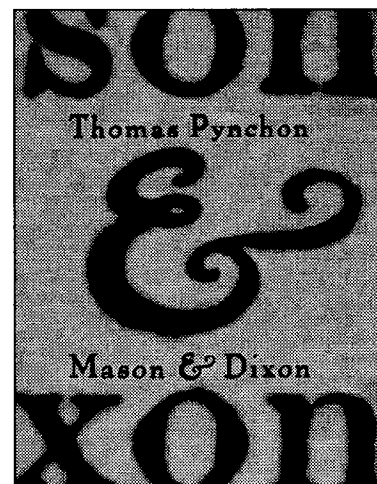
It's surely too soon to post final verdicts about a novel that reportedly was almost a quarter of a century in the making. But the evidence after a first reading is that the same paradoxical, all-American anti-intellectualism that has often empowered Pynchon in the past to ride roughshod over decorum has finally caught up with him and become a kind of trap—even a kind of escape-clause for his seriousness. Brilliant as it often is in both design and detail, *Mason & Dixon* afforded me less pleasure than any Pynchon novel to date, perhaps because the imagination that might have melded it all into a vision seems to be working at half the intensity such a farrago requires. The 18th century as a living entity never quite emerges, even if ideas and fancies about it abound. Scenes are mainly sketched in rather than painted: For example, when Mason and Dixon first meet, at a public execution in London, Pynchon never gets around to describing the execution itself.

Even *Vineland*, the most problematic of Pynchon's novels

before this one, is more emotionally affecting, registering a massive sense of personal loss that not even his artistry and intelligence can entirely rationalize or transform. Noting the 18th century setting of *Mason & Dixon*, *Boston Phoenix* reviewer Peter Keough has shrewdly called the novel pre-revolutionary. In relation to '60s and early '70s counterculture, the subject of *Vineland*, it is plainly post-revolutionary as well. The sense of historical defeat enacted and wrestled with in *Vineland* is finally accepted here, and the cost of that acceptance is a crippling, willful desire to provide endless stretches of light entertainment—presumably administered like a narcotic in order to dull the pain. Maybe if I *were* lightly entertained, I'd have less cause for complaint; too much of the time, I felt I was being hustled through the fun like a bout of basic training.

For all the preoccupations with history in Pynchon's previous work, *Mason & Dixon* is his first historical novel—if only because the title protagonists, British surveyors Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon, are historical figures whose lives can't be invented out of whole cloth. But just because these men belong to history doesn't mean that history or agency falls within their grasp. Basically fall guys, more acted upon than actors, they are defined in the novel mainly as behavioral essences. Melancholy London astronomer Mason favors wine and perpetually mourns the death of his wife Rebekah. The taste of cheerful rural surveyor Dixon, the younger of the two, runs more to whiskey and womanizing. Pynchon plays Mason's brooding against Dixon's laid-back carousing as the yin and yang of his own sensibility. Yet for all his attempts at balance, it's the melancholy that predominates.

A little over halfway through the novel, the principal recounter of their adventures, the fictional Reverend Wicks Cherrycoke, offers a bit of theory on what comprises history. This quote from his monograph, "Christ and History," might be taken as an apologia for Pynchon's own narrative method: "History is not Chronology, for that is left to lawyers,—nor is it Remembrance, for Remembrance belongs to the People. History can as little pretend to the Veracity of the one, as claim the Power of the other,—her Practitioners, to survive, must soon learn the arts of the quidnunc, spy, and Taproom Wit,—that there may ever continue more than one life-line back into a Past we risk, each day, losing our forebears in forev-



**Mason & Dixon**  
By Thomas Pynchon  
Henry Holt  
773 pp., \$27.50



er,—not a Chain of single Links, for one broken Link could lose us All,—rather, a great disorderly Tangle of Lines, long and short, weak and strong, vanishing into the Mnemonick Deep, with only their Destination in common.”

Mason and Dixon's lives together, governed by the Royal Astrological Society, consist of (1) being dispatched in 1761 to the Cape of Good Hope to observe the transit of Venus (a rare alignment of the earth, sun and Venus), after an earlier scheme to observe the transit from Sumatra was thwarted by the attack of a French frigate on their ship en route; (2) being sent to survey and establish the 233-mile line between Maryland and Pennsylvania (1765-1768) that became the dividing line in the Civil War a century later; and (3) being sent to Ireland in 1769 to observe the second transit of Venus and other astral phenomena.

Pynchon seizes upon this linear three-part itinerary to create his overall narrative structure. He splits the novel into three sections like a sandwich (one of the 18th century inventions evoked along the way). America is the big lump of meat to be carved up between the bread slices of the two astronomical assignments. (The book's title is another sandwich in which the ampersand, a curving tangle, is the filling between two matching linear masses of five letters each.) Parceled into 78 bite-size chapters, the story is relatively easy to read, once one becomes accustomed to the 18th century language. But the novel is almost impossible to digest as something much more than a miniseries.

Not counting a few side trips, flashbacks and a framing device that takes in the deaths of the two heroes, Mason and Dixon's three assignments make up the basic plot of the novel. As events, they aren't terribly interesting in themselves, though as applications of knowledge, Pynchon sees them as virtually the sum of the aspirations of 18th century Enlightenment. The importance of the Mason-Dixon Line in separating the slave-owning South from the abolitionist North became clear only some time after the surveyors' efforts. This doesn't prevent both characters from participating in an ongoing debate about the political and philosophical implications of their work, which forms the novel's most sustained through-line.

But the moment-to-moment texture of *Mason & Dixon*, especially its 458-page middle section, is far from linear. I'm speaking, of course, about the American wilderness that the Mason-Dixon Line is supposed to be bisecting, regulating and taming. Perceived mainly as disorderly interpolations, this great “Tangle of Lines” evoked by Cherrycoke comes in the form of tall tales, crackpot theorizing and other digressions heard and encountered by Mason and Dixon during their four years of tedious (if enlightened) line-drawing. It's only when the chaotic tangle of interpolations and the straight line of the surveyors are seen juxtaposed that the design of the novel starts to seem less mechanical and more mysterious.

Following a single hero, *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon's 1973 novel, begins like a relatively conventional story only

to wind up in a non-narrative freefall. The novel apes the arc of a rocket's ascent and descent by surrendering to gravity while scattering its hero's quest and identity. By contrast, *Mason & Dixon* interfaces linear, rational plot with a tangle of surmise and deflection. The jumble of countless mini-plots adds up to no story at all but a kind of obsessive doodling. Among the doodles are segments that a good many other reviewers have been showering with praise: a tale of a giant cheese, a running gag about a mechanical duck in love with a French chef, a dope-smoking session with George Washington in Mount Vernon, a talking dog and countless others. Some of these indeed have their riotous, ingenious or even moving bits, yet taken in bulk they often seem programmatic and forced—a determination to be lighthearted that weighs heavily on the project as a whole.

This tendency has always been somewhat operative in Pynchon's work; perhaps what makes it more limiting here is the lesser amounts of passion and urgency that set it off. It's almost as if Pynchon regards himself now as a journeyman like Mason rather than as the explorer he used to be. He thinks he knows what's out there in the wilderness, and, determined not to lose his bearings, he's content to spin goofy, boys-club yarns about it. I wish him well, but I miss the fear and madness that pierced his earlier quests. ◀

Jonathan Rosenbaum's newly published collection of essays, *Movies as Politics*, was reviewed in the June 16 issue of *In These Times*. He reviews films for the *Chicago Reader*.

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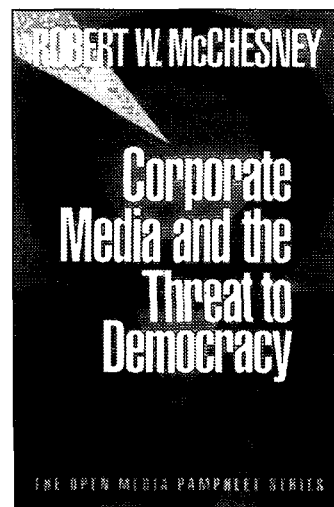
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# Disarmament

Continued from page 17

not currently have nuclear weapons, it could provoke these states to redouble their weapons programs.

The fundamental problem with the START talks is that the principle underlining the possession of nuclear weapons—deterrence—remains sacrosanct. But as the world evolves from a bipolar confrontation to multipolar relationships, the question arises: If deterrence is a legitimate strategy for the United States and Russia, why isn't it legitimate for India or Iran? "Proliferation cannot be contained in a world where a handful of self-appointed nations both arrogate to themselves the privilege of owning nuclear weapons and extol the ultimate security assurances they assert such weapons convey," Butler wrote in *Disarmament Times*.

Deterrence was born of the desire to contain the Soviet Union. Even though the Soviet Union is dead, the doctrine survives. "The purpose of the remaining arsenals is rarely defined," says Jonathan Schell, who wrote *The Fate of the Earth*, the 1982 book that helped awaken the general public to the threat of the new arms race. "Vague references are made to unspecified future contingencies. ... It appears that nuclear weapons have won complete autonomy from political goals and purposes, as if they had scores of their own to settle, independently of their human makers." ◀

Jim Wurst is a journalist based at the United Nations who specializes in disarmament and international security issues.

# Messinger

Continued from page 19

work forces in exchange for meager promises of no layoffs and small salary increases. For many of the city's public union leaders, the prospect of opposing Giuliani and then watching him re-elected to wreak his revenge is horrible. Said one political lobbyist who preferred anonymity: "The unions feel boxed in with the mayor. They believe the mayor's people are terrorists, so they will have to play footsie with the Giuliani campaign."

Hill, whose membership is mostly black or Latino and Democrat, will likely show his support of Giuliani by not publicly supporting anyone in the mayor's race. Feldman has said she will wait until after the September primary to endorse anyone, but has said positive things about Giuliani. On the other hand, Dennis Rivera, the head of 1199, the hospital workers union, is a strong Messinger supporter. His union's endorsement, along with one from UNITE!, the garment workers' union, is imminent. So far, Rivera has been biding his time, building a coalition of progressive political, union and community groups. Insiders say Rivera plans a series of anti-Giuliani ads leading up to the November election to weaken the mayor's seemingly unassailable position. Rivera is well-connected to the national Democratic Party apparatus, his private-sector union has a lot of money and is fairly safe from Giuliani's reach, and his membership could be easily mobilized on Messinger's behalf.

Giuliani is ahead of Messinger in recent polls by 49 percent to 39 percent. His inability to crack 50 percent represents an opportunity for Messinger, a chance to find her footing—sandals, grapes and all. Yet, she can't beat a law-and-order mayor at his own game, and when she tries, it only alienates her natural base of supporters, who fear that in a second and final term, Giuliani unfettered will veer even more sharply to the right. The task for Messinger is to shed her centrist image and cut loose with the principles and passions that inspired her—and so many others—in the '60s.

The mayor has a lock on big money and the votes it can buy. But Messinger should have a lock on the votes of the working poor and poor who've watched their schools, hospitals and services erode in the last four years. She has nothing to lose and a mayoralty to gain. ◀

Annette Fuentes is a freelance writer based in New York. Her latest article for *In These Times*, "White coats, blue collars," appeared in the March 3 issue.



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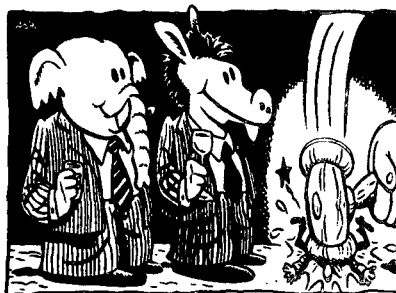
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*Continued from page 32*

*Did to the Movies*, Williamson writes that the hillbilly's outhouse is a reminder of "our conflicted memory of the pain and heartache of living in the dirt on the frontier." He calls it "the pig's bladder at the American garden party."

The exploding outhouse in Speer's collection personifies this idea of the outhouse as an unpleasant joke. The detonating device is a mouse trap that blows the 10-inch-tall structure apart when some unsuspecting person tries to open the outhouse door.

Her collection also includes an outhouse emergency kit that consists of a cigarette, corncob and matches tucked into a piece of wood. If you need to find your way to the outhouse in the dark, Speer has what you need: a hillbilly flashlight made from a stick with a clothespin glued to the end and a box of Red Top matches. Once you've done your business, don't forget the hillbilly deodorizer: a match.

"Are people getting a laugh on the tourists who buy them? Do they not worry about the symbolic repercussions? I've never been quite sure about that," says Speer.

Williamson doesn't worry about who is laughing at whom, and he's not particularly offended. "Outrage doesn't get us anywhere. Understanding and co-opting the images gets us a lot further," he says.

And so he would encourage us to embrace the Kentucky hillbilly woman-getter (a rough-hewn wooden mallet); the hillbilly "nite lite" (a candle set on the end of a stick); the hillbilly tax shelter (a tiny wooden roof over four tacks); and the hillbilly bug killer (a piece of wood with the words "Place bug here" emblazoned on it alongside a tiny hammer).

Do we really gotta laugh? Williamson says yes, unequivocally, because we're having the last laugh. "People offended are highly educated folks who have lost their sense of humor," he says. "It's just one of the wonderful ironies to me. This country is three-quarters urban. Only one-quarter is still rural, and yet the rural in our mass culture is stronger than ever."

Commerce proves it. "Country music is the number-one selling music, and it struggled for years, especially in the '30s and '40s," Williamson says. "It was being resisted in sophisticated magazines as beneath contempt. That 'god awful nasal twang' and the lyrics they thought were ridiculous. Country music has got the last laugh."

Ironically, it's the merging of urban and rural that often serves as inspiration for the creation of hillbilly souvenirs. Take for instance the hillbilly computer, a block of wood with five holes cut in it bearing these "instruxunz": "Stuff the fingers of yer lef hand thru the holes soz yuh kin count em. Special instruxunz fer lef handed foks: jis turn the dum thang over."

Or the hillbilly word processor: a pencil.

But who creates these images? Hillbillyana can come from just about anywhere, including the Orient.

One piece from Williamson's collection, a hillbilly salt

and pepper shaker set, was made in Japan, probably in the '30s. "They didn't get the hillbilly look quite right," Williamson says. "He looks a little like Fu Man Chu. He has the beard and overalls, he's long and lanky, but there's a decidedly oriental look to his face."

Other items are made and marketed within the region. Speer owns a Kentucky coffee mug that she finds particularly interesting. It bears a map of the state. In the bluegrass region, there is a jockey drinking a glass of champagne. In eastern Kentucky, you find two barefoot hillbillies stretched out next to their moonshine jugs. What, Speer wonders, is Kentucky trying to say about itself?

Williamson has questions of his own. Like who, besides himself and Jean Speer, are buying these hillbilly souvenirs? He has his theories. "I think it's mainly country people who have them. It may be a kind of recognition of status, also a kind of laughing in the face of status. I know middle-class black people who collect pickaninny stuff. There's a kind of reverse psychology there. By embracing those images, they're affirming something not the stereotypical."

Williamson explains that in *The Art of Democracy*, author Jim Cullen talks about minstrel shows. The accepted interpretation was that white people dressed in black face were making fun of black people. Cullen disagrees, arguing that the black culture was put on stage and paraded in front of whites, who may have laughed but were forced to look at black culture.

"That is the art of our democracy," Williamson says. "The group that seems to be completely shut out has avenues into the conversation. I don't think people are actively saying this is how much contempt I have for southern mountain people. I think there's an embracing of the rural figure into the conversation. It's a warped view of them, no doubt, but it's a presence."

By taking this large and forgiving view of hillbilly stereotypes, we can ease the sting, Williamson says. Heck, we can even laugh, especially at hillbilly bubble bath: a package of pinto beans with the instructions, "Cook and eat one hour before bathing."

I may even consider adding to the wealth of hillbillyana myself: a bumper sticker that reads, "Georgia cracker by birth, Tennessee hillbilly by the grace of God."

Jan Hearn is a freelance writer in Johnson City, Tenn.



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# HILLBILLYANA



When I was nine years old, my family moved from Atlanta to Knoxville, Tenn. My mother gave me this advice: "Honey, don't let these Tennessee people call you a cracker. They can call you a Georgia peach, but never a cracker." It did not occur to her that when we moved back to Atlanta four years later I might suffer ridicule at the hands of my native people. My first day at Sandy Springs High School, a chubby boy with blond hair asked me a question about a local sports figure. I had no idea who he was talking about. He gave me a smirk, and then turned to his friend and said, "She doesn't know anything; she's from Tennessee. They don't wear shoes there."

In an instant, I became a Tennessee hillbilly, and I've remembered the insult ever since.

Jean Speer, director of the Center for Appalachian Studies at East Tennessee State University in Johnson City, Tenn., and J.W. Williamson, editor of the *Appalachian Journal* and an English professor at Appalachian State University in Boone, N.C., do not share my lack of humor about the hillbilly stereotype. For decades, these serious scholars have been collecting what they call hillbillyana—the kitschy stuff that Tennessee, Kentucky and West Virginia chain restaurants and gift shops traffick to tourists. If you've traveled the southern Appalachians, you've seen it: the corncob crackers, moonshine-jug salt and pepper shakers and outhouse collectibles. Looming over all is the image of the long, lanky hillbilly dressed in overalls and an oversized hat, sporting a beard and bare feet. He is usually portrayed in a reclining position surrounded by his trusty rifle and clutching a moonshine jug. Often as not, a skinny hound is curled up next to him.

This hillbilly icon appears on place mats, coffee mugs, cocktail napkins, plates and ashtrays. You name it, and Speer and/or Williamson probably have it. While their collections may differ—Williamson focuses on items from the mid-'20s through the '50s, and Speer's collection is of a more-recent vintage—the share similar reasons for collecting.

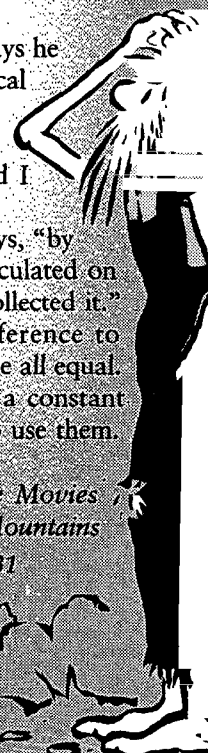
"I've always been interested in images people have of the Appalachian region," Speer says. A native of Memphis, Speer has studied "the politics of where images come from and how they operate." She collects herself and for her students. "I want to show how much that hillbilly image became a way of marketing the region."

Williamson, who hails from Texas, says he was continually confronted by stereotypical hillbilly images. "I love junk stores, flea markets, antique stores," he says. "These things were everywhere, and I began to buy them."

"I was particularly fascinated," he says, "by the outhouse as a kind of icon and speculated on what message it held for people who collected it." He thinks it is "a kind of joking reference to democracy, a kind of reminder that we're all equal. I grew up with outhouses. They were a constant source of humor for people who had to use them. It's a leveler."

In his book *Hillbillyland: What the Movies Did to the Mountains and What the Mountains*

*Continued on page 31*



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